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Mohamed Ahmed, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

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Aid restored

THE US Senate Appropriations Committee has approved an amendment seeking to restore specified funding of $2.1 billion in aid to Egypt in next year's foreign aid package when it comes before the full Senate next month, **Hoda Tawfik** reports from Washington.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens joined with several other committee members and US President Bill Clinton's administration to support the continuation of military and economic assistance for Egypt in return for its influential role in the region and its strong support of the Middle East peace process. Stevens said the sub-committee's action last week in dropping the Egyptian aid package "sends the wrong message to President Mubarak and the Egyptian people."

The amendment, approved in the committee on Tuesday with the majority of 27 to 1, sought to reverse the earlier decision by the Appropriations Sub-committee last week to withdraw the annual $2.1 billion in US aid to Egypt. The sub-committee only approved US aid of $3 billion per year to Israel and endorsed a new grant of $250 million for Jordan.

With strong backing from both Republican and Democrat senate members, the amendment is expected to be approved when it comes before the full Senate next month. The senior Democrat in the Appropriations Committee, Senator Robert Byrd, and the senior Democrat on the Foreign Operations Sub-committee, Senator Patrick Leahy, vowed strong support for the funding to Egypt.

Foreign Appropriations Sub-committee Chairman Mitch McConnell, who surprised the Senate last week with his proposal to end the traditional grant for Cairo, promised several hours of debate on the issue before the full Senate.

Senator McConnell on Tuesday repeated his attacks against Egypt's policies and its role in the peace process. But Senator Leahy defended Egypt and its early support for the peace process. (see p.2)

Annex all

ISRAEL's parliament, the Knesset, has passed a preliminary resolution in favour of annexing all Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories to Israel. In a session attended by only 25 of the Knesset's 120 members, 21 right-wing deputies voted in favour of the resolution submitted by a member of the far-right Moledet Party.

Three opposition parliament members voted against the proposal. Yesterday's vote sent the draft bill to a parliament committee for debate. If the committee approves the measure, it would then have to receive a majority of the full Knesset in three successive readings to come into effect.

Seven years

A CAIRO court yesterday sentenced the owner of the apartment block which collapsed in the posh district of Heliopolis last year — crushing to death 64 people and injuring 16 — to seven years in jail with hard labour.

The prosecutor had charged owner Raouf Wissa with causing the death of the residents by disregarding design plans, constructing faulty support and building five illegal floors on top of the building.

The court also sentenced architect Ahmed Riyad and Ashraf El-Magari to three years in jail with hard labour and fined them LE325,000 each. It acquitted Abdel-Aziz Khodeir, who was helping the two men remodel a flat on the first floor. All three had been charged with removing vital supports and pillars.

Closing ranks

The eight Damascus Declaration states are meeting in Latakia to forge closer economic ties that may serve as the nucleus of a common Arab market

Against the background of a stalled peace process and escalating tensions in the Middle East, the foreign ministers of the eight Damascus Declaration states are meeting in Syria's Mediterranean port of Latakia in an attempt to cement economic, and possibly military, cooperation.

The alliance, born after the 1991 Gulf war, groups Egypt and Syria with the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

With no pre-set agenda, the eight ministers had a wide-range of issues to discuss, including the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process, the future of Arab-Israeli relations and defence arrangements for the Gulf region. But the dominant theme was the establishment of a common market that would group the eight states but remain open to other Arabs. This market could serve as a substitute for Middle Eastern, or Arab-Israeli, economic cooperation scenarios, which are strongly opposed by Syria.

Egypt presented the meeting with a study recommending stronger economic and defence ties between the eight states. The Egyptian paper argued that inter-Arab economic cooperation was the backbone of Arab political clout and suggested ways for the optimum use of their natural, human and economic resources.

"This does not mean that by the end of the meeting [today], the establishment of this market will be announced," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa before flying to Syria.

The Egyptian paper also urged closer bilateral and multilateral defence and security cooperation between the member-states to ward off the threat of foreign military intervention.

Diplomats said that unlike the previous 14 meetings, which generated a great deal of talk and little action, this convention is different. The change, at least on the Egyptian side, is due to apprehensions that too many political and military upheavals may invite a new "arrangement" to be imposed on the region, likely to include a more influential role for Israel, military confrontations that could turn the region into a market for the Western arms industry and a new economic *fait accompli* making Israel a partner in every developmental regional project.

At a time when peace-making faced an impasse as a result of Israel's expansionist policy, Turkey forged a military accord with Israel and launched a military incursion into northern Iraq. In the meantime, Israel has been trying to consolidate its economic ties with the oil-rich Arab Gulf states. Qatar has announced that it is going to host the coming summit for Middle Eastern economic cooperation in November, irrespective of the situation in the peace process.

Moreover, the US, unequivocal about its intention to maintain the sanctions against Libya and Iraq, also made it clear that, five years after the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invaders, it was determined to maintain its military presence in the Gulf. This presence has been criticised by Iran, whose forces occupy the island of Abu Moussa, threatening oil-shipping lanes that go through the Hormuz Straits.

Foreign Ministry officials assert that Egypt, which has serious concerns about the future of the region, will exert maximum diplomatic efforts to ensure stability as well as a fair balance of political, military and economic power.

In a Cairo Television interview aired last Sunday, Foreign Minister Moussa said that a basic question must be asked: "What kind of situation will exist in the region in the coming five to 10 years." He affirmed that Egypt "cannot leave things to drift in a way that allows for the kind of tension that will open the door wide for international plans" to be imposed on the region.

Moussa made it clear that Egypt cannot afford to isolate itself from what is happening "east, west, south or north of it" because these developments are bound to have a major impact on domestic security, social arrangements and Egypt's political role.

To secure its interests, Egyptian diplomacy has been active on three fronts: boosting the already strong ties with such Arab capitals as Riyadh and Damascus, patching up relations with other capitals such as Ankara and Tehran, and advocating strong inter-Arab cooperation.

During the last few weeks, President Hosni Mubarak has visited Morocco and Libya in an attempt to boost Egypt's bilateral trade and economic relations with the two North African states. And early in July the Egyptian-Saudi Arabian and Egyptian-Jordanian higher committees will meet, also to boost bilateral relations.

Sources concede, however, that the proposed common Arab market — an idea that has been floated for years — is bound to face serious obstacles, including the lack of interest shown by several Gulf states. "Without them, the market is bound to be a weak grouping," said a source, who also warning that multi-national giants have "a vested interest in undermining this project."

The idea, however, has already attracted a Saudi Arabian declaration of support. "The kingdom calls for cooperation among Arab states, especially in the economic field and we support the establishment of this market," said Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal. "We will discuss this issue with an open heart and mind."

Diplomatic sources said Egyptian suggestions included the immediate establishment of a free trade zone and the removal of all customs barriers within four years, paving the way for the emergence of a fully fledged common market.

Saudi Arabia submitted a draft security protocol to the conference, suggesting that the eight Damascus Declaration states collectively confront any aggression on a member-state. The protocol also bars interference in the domestic affairs of a member-state.

The differences between Syria and Qatar over the latter's insistence on hosting the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic summit, which is opposed by the former, cast shadows over the Latakia gathering. Qatar did not send its foreign minister to Latakia but was represented by Ahmed bin Abdallah Al-Mahmoud, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is also the coordinator of MENA IV. Kuwait, likewise, was represented by Abdel-Aziz El-Dkheil, minister of state for cabinet affairs, and not its foreign minister. Kuwait was reportedly angered by Syria's decision to restore trade ties with Iraq.

A diplomatic source said Syria, in order to avoid a public clash, will not directly urge Qatar to scrap plans for MENA IV. Instead, it will insist on the implementation of a recommendation taken earlier by Arab foreign ministers to boycott multilateral talks with Israel. This will amount to an indirect call on Qatar not to organise the summit.

***Dina Ezzat** in Cairo; **Atef Saqr** in Latakia*



WHEN IT comes to protesting Israeli injustice, age is not a factor. An elderly woman (above) teams up with rock-throwing Palestinian youths in the second straight week of clashes between Israeli troops and protesters in Hebron. By 22 June, hospitals in this West Bank city were treating more than 150 Palestinians injured by rubber bullets. This week, the fighting spread into Nahlus. *(photo: Khaled Zighan)*

The cracks widen

Though Netanyahu narrowly survived yesterday's opposition no-confidence motion, few commentators believe Israel's government can survive for much longer, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

"From crisis to crisis, our strength increases," said Likud Knesset member Michael Eitan earlier this week. And while most Israeli commentators would agree with the first part of this sentence as a description of the current state of Israel's Likud-led government, few would concur with the second.

Though Binyamin Netanyahu's six party coalition survived an opposition no-confidence motion by 55 votes to 50 yesterday, his government now finds itself in a minority in the 120 seat Knesset. And within Israel there is a growing consensus that Netanyahu's government, in its present form at least, will not survive for much longer. As Israeli commentator Bina Barzel put it in *Yedi-ot Aharonot* on 24 June: "The cracks in (Netanyahu's) house are widening and one day the walls might truly collapse".

For Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the most bizarre aspect of the collapse is that it has little to do with the moribund Oslo process. A week of clashes along the new front-lines of Hebron and Gaza has again shown how precarious and violent the "peace" is between Israel and the Palestinians.

By Sunday hospital sources in Hebron had reported treating 150 injured Palestinians, including 10 critical cases of Palestinians shot by the army at close range with rubber-coated metal bullets.

Meanwhile, IDF intelligence officers have leaked assessments to the Israeli press that a further round of confrontations in the Occupied Territories might bring about the "total collapse" of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Yasser Arafat has also warned of "total explosion" should the peace process fail.

Yet it is neither Hebron nor the Israeli army's assessments that lie behind current ructions in the coalition. These are, rather, aspects of the fall-out of last week's resignation of Dan Meridor, former finance minister, ostensibly because of differences over economic policy but actually due to Meridor's overall "lack of trust" in his premier.

Three days after Meridor's announcement, Communication Minister Limor Livant declared that she too was resigning her post as Likud liaison officer between the cabinet and the Knesset. Although Livant had no disagreement with the government's policies, she said she could no longer serve as a liaison since she was excluded from Netanyahu's "decision-making processes".

To make matters worse for the Israeli leader, the Russian immigrant Yisrael Ba'aliya (YB) Party (which has a minister and seven Knesset members) announced on 22 June that it would consider voting with the opposition on the no-confidence vote unless Netanyahu acted on promises made to the party when the coalition was formed after the Israeli elections last year.

With a majority of just three in the Knesset, Netanyahu took YB's threat seriously and at a last ditch meeting on 23 June agreed to deliver a 225 million shekel package of housing subsidies, job placements and cultural integration programmes to the Russians. Netanyahu's generosity effectively bought YB loyalty until the next crisis though in the process made a mockery of his budget cut proposals in the fields of immigration and housing construction.

Netanyahu's clash with Meridor may have had economics as its excuse but most Israeli commentators believe that Netanyahu created the crisis with his dissident finance minister the better to remove him and pave the way for a more loyalist front bench. If so, the chief beneficiary from the shakedown is likely to be Israel's current National Infrastructure Minister and former Defence Minister Ariel Sharon.

Sharon is favourite to replace Meridor at Finance, and has indicated that he will accept the post on condition that he retains control of Israel's Lands Authority and Water Commission. Netanyahu, currently, is resisting Sharon's demands but, given recent precedents, is likely to cave in if Sharon sticks to his demands. With the Likud Party and the governing coalition in disarray, Netanyahu needs all the support he can muster. Sharon is enormously popular among Likud's rank and file and enjoys solid relations with Israel's religious parties and, ironically, with the Russian immigrants.

Should Sharon receive the enlarged finance portfolio, he will be the most powerful politician in Israel after Netanyahu, consolidating the comeback of a politician best remembered as the brutal conqueror of Gaza in the early 1970s and the architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. For Israelis, a government with Sharon at the head will mean more money being diverted from social programmes at home to settlements and settlers in the occupied territories. For Palestinians (and Arabs generally), Sharon has always meant occupation and war. This was certainly true in the past. And, given the current situation, is likely to be so in the future. (see p.4)

INSIDE

A threat to withhold US aid to Egypt as punishment for its role in the peace process and the region had Egyptians both angry and contemptuous

Angry but undaunted

Government, opposition and public opinion were united in their response to a decision by a Senate subcommittee to cut off aid to Egypt: an insult, but by no means a threat. **Nevine Khalil** monitors the uproar

There was an angry public reaction in Egypt to last week's decision by a US Senate subcommittee to withdraw US aid from Egypt on the grounds that it pursued an obstructionist policy in regional peace-making. Officials, opposition parties and analysts agreed that the move was an attempt to pressure Egypt into softening its opposition to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's hardline policies and halting its efforts to close Arab ranks.

What enraged public opinion most were the reasons given by the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, namely that President Hosni Mubarak refused to attend a Washington summit last September with President Clinton, Netanyahu and Jordan's King Hussein, Cairo's suspension of the multilateral peace talks and alleged blocking of progress on a Hebron deal. Cairo was also accused of leading an effort to re-impose the Arab economic boycott of Israel, spelt out in the recommendations of last June's Arab summit, and "building close ties with Libya", which the US views as a terrorist state.

According to Ahmed Fakhr, head of the Middle East Studies Centre, the rationale behind the decision was to "punish Egypt," but, he added, "we have nothing to apologise for. This decision is unacceptable." It would have been more reasonable if the reasons cited were of a more domestic type, such as economic problems or the United States' large foreign debt, he said.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said the decision would not affect Egypt's commitment to the peace process and its efforts to salvage it. Moussa added that the attempts to "taint the Egyptian role untruthfully" would not alter Cairo's diplomatic efforts, adding that Egypt had always known that the aid would not continue forever.

President Mubarak has said on numerous occasions that Egypt will not succumb to pressure by foreign powers through aid or other means. The intensive economic reform programme of the past few years is part of an effort to avoid dependence on aid. Cairo is also turning to its Arab neighbours to create an effective economic bloc in the region. With three heavyweights — Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia — at the helm, such a bloc would augment the Arabs' political clout.

Fouad Seraggeddin, head of the liberal Wafd Party, believes that the subcommittee's decision was clear evidence of Egypt's integrity and a "medal" attesting to the Egyptian administration's "patriotism", because the reasons given prove that Egyptian decision-making is free of foreign influence. In a statement published on Saturday, Seraggeddin called for Egypt to end all US aid in order to safeguard its independence. His party had warned in the past, he said, that "he who does not have control of his bread, does not control his decision."

The subcommittee's decision was described as "cheap blackmail" by Ibrahim Shukri, leader of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. It was particularly unacceptable, he said, in view of the US's supposed role in seeking a just peace in the region, and asserted that "it would never have happened if it wasn't for the Zionist lobby in the US." It was not to any party's advantage, he added, to use such tactics to pressure Egypt.

The leftist Tagammu Party issued a statement on Sunday declaring that US pressure should not "terrorise or force our people to surrender." It noted that the party had repeatedly underlined the fact that the US links aid donations to its own "supreme strategic interests," one of which is to "shape the Arab will to accept Israel's colonial-settlement schemes." The statement warned against Egypt "becoming part of a superpower's supreme strategy" and affirmed that Egypt is more than capable of overcoming these pressure tactics by drawing on national resources.

The Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee removed aid allocations for Egypt totalling $2.1 billion, while maintaining Israel's $3 billion grant and creating a $250 million fund for Jordan. The move was the first of its kind since Egypt and Israel signed the US-brokered Camp David peace accords in 1978.

At a meeting of the subcommittee, Senator Mitch McConnell said that over the past 18 months "there has been a dramatic change in Egypt's approach to peace." He said that the US had provided Egypt with more than $42 billion "based on Cairo's commitment to Camp David and working towards full, normal relations with Israel." Now, he continued, the cool relationship between Egypt and Israel had become a "freeze." These problems, he claimed, "did not result from a change in government in Israel."

The senator contrasted Egypt and Jordan's performance in the peace process, concluding that Amman deserved $250 million in economic and security aid, Egypt none and Israel the full $3 billion. McConnell noted, however, that if passed, the subcommittee's bill "does not mean the Administration is prohibited from continuing assistance [to Egypt] if conditions warrant the aid."

This was the first step in a congressional debate on the fiscal 1998 foreign aid appropriations. The subcommittee's plan went before the full Appropriations Committee on Tuesday before reaching the full Senate. The bill is yet to be discussed by the House spending committees.

The motion conflicts with Washington's declared Middle East policy and so would not necessarily mean the end of US aid to Egypt. And even if Congress passes the bill, Clinton has the power to veto it. Alternatively, the US administration could still dig out aid money for Cairo from the rest of the US foreign aid budget.

Seraggeddin described the decision as another milestone on the road of "blind US bias" towards Netanyahu's destructive policies, which have brought about the collapse of the peace process. He called upon all Arabs to review their position in the face of continued Israeli intransigence, which is "greatly supported by a pro-Israeli congressional lobby".

Opposition to the subcommittee's decision came from Senator Robert Byrd, who defended Egypt's peace policies, described the subcommittee's decision as "extraordinarily unfair" and said he hoped the move "can be corrected before even more damage is done." In a statement to the Senate, Byrd said that Egypt was playing a "central and responsible role [and] should be commended for its diplomatic actions, not seemingly punished for its courage." He strongly criticised Netanyahu's policies, especially settlement building, which he described as "a development sure to engender violence and the disruption of the peace process."

He said that progress on the peace track "has required the dedication of the leaders of Israel, Egypt and the US," adding that the decision was "flagrantly unfair and does a disservice to Egypt, the US, and to our national interests of making peace in the Middle East." The subcommittee was "adding insult to injury" by giving Jordan $250 million from what was understood to be Egypt's account bill, he said.

Political analyst Ahmed Fakhr believes the decision is not even close to being the final word regarding US aid to Egypt. "The motion can be killed anywhere on the way to a vote," he said, explaining that the process of passing the bill is very long, entailing reviews by numerous sub-committees and committees.

Although he hopes that aid will not be suspended, Fakhr believes that "one shouldn't pay too high a political price to keep it." In his view, both parties would lose if the US were to cut its $1.3 billion in military aid to Egypt — the US is, in any case, committed to five-year plans outlined by the joint US-Egyptian Military Committee. "The military grants are mainly spent on the purchase of US-made weaponry, so it is of mutual benefit," Fakhr said. "But Egypt also cooperates with a number of states, such as France, to modernise its military machine, so there would be alternatives."

A blessing in disguise?

While some MPs maintain that the withdrawal of American aid would be a blow to the growth of the national infrastructure, others argue that it would promote self-reliance. **Gamal Essam El-Din** gauges parliamentary sentiment

There is little real difficulty in winning a stamp of approval from the ruling National Democratic Party-dominated People's Assembly for American aid grants. However, as the recent debate of six US assistance grants proved, the topic is a controversial one, and a number of vocal MPs are quick to express their doubts. They argue that the terms of the grants make them more favourable to the donor than the recipient, and express fears that the continued acceptance of large grants could lead to the creation of a dependency culture.

Some deputies interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* argued that if American aid was cut off — as a US senate sub-committee has recently suggested — the government should seize the opportunity to adopt a new approach of greater self-reliance in implementing economic development projects. They pointed out that the vast majority of Egyptians have never felt that American aid brought any concrete improvements to their lives.

Others maintained that US aid was instrumental in rebuilding the national infrastructure. *If this aid were to stop, they argued,* urgently-needed services such as waste water treatment and water supply projects could be adversely affected.

In the view of Ayman Nour of the opposition Wafd Party, the vast amount of American aid poured into this country during the past 20 years has yielded poor results. The reason for this, he said, was that a large part of the aid money went to American consultants and the handful of Egyptians working with them. He cited as an example a $107-million grant for the energy sector. Of this amount, $55 million was earmarked for fees for American consultants and experts. He also mentioned a grant to rehabilitate Alexandria's sewage system at an estimated cost of $405 million. "The American consultancy office charged more than $130 million for conducting studies and research, although the decision whether the sewage water should be dumped into the sea or the desert remains to be taken," Nour said.

Nour also held American aid responsible for the proliferation of corruption in some government offices. "Although the American law governing aid bans the use of the money for commissions or bonuses, the fact remains that large amounts of this money are misappropriated," *Nour alleged. He cited a $30 million grant to* the Population and Family Planning Project as an example, claiming that part of this money was used to redecorate a cabinet minister's office.

Zakaria Azmi, MP and chief of the presidential staff, has charged repeatedly before the Assembly that US aid money is misspent in the form of generous bonuses, the purchase of luxury cars and expensive promotion campaigns.

MPs also charge that US aid had exposed the innermost details of Egyptian society to American consultants and experts and accelerated Egypt's economic dependence on the United States. "US aid has become so all-pervasive in this country, infiltrating almost every economic sector," said El-Badri Farghali, a leftist MP. "USAID has provided grants even to the People's Assembly and Shura Council themselves. I'm sure that these grants have enabled the army of US consultants to gather huge amounts of information about Egyptian society."

Farghali cited a $149 million grant to the National Agricultural Research Project, which employed hundreds of American consultants and experts. "They may be inefficient and inexperienced but they are under instructions to gather as much information as possible about *Egyptian agriculture," he claimed.*

USAID is not granted to all countries on the same basis, he added. "One cannot help but compare US aid to Egypt to the USAID programme to Israel," he said. "There is not a single USAID official making decisions for Israel."

Farghali likened Egypt's 20-year use of American aid to "getting addicted to drugs. It has reinforced dependence and given the Americans the opportunity to have the main say in prime economic decisions."

Some MPs also charged that the terms of the aid grants infringed on national laws and the sovereignty of the People's Assembly. "Consider the US grant to the energy sector," explained Mohamed Khalil Qouita, a deputy for Damietta. "It states that US contractors should be exempt from a 10-year building safety guarantee. Another $11 million grant to private voluntary institutions states that USAID has the right to monitor and inspect the projects funded by this grant at any time."

However other MPs, such as majority leader Ahmed Abu Zeid, believe that cutting off American aid would badly affect the lives of millions of Egyptians who benefit from US-funded water supply, water treatment and power-generating *projects. American aid has also saved the lives* of tens of thousands of children by helping to implement an oral rehydration programme, according to Abu Zeid.

Responding to parliamentary criticism of USAID, Abu Zeid commented: "It is only natural, and it should be expected, that any country that provides aid should stipulate that the recipient uses experts or buys equipment from that country. It should also be expected that any country, especially a superpower like the United States, would not pour billions of dollars into a foreign country without trying to further its own economic and political interests. It is a community of interests."

While conceding that Egypt would suffer as a result of the withdrawal of aid, Abu Zeid warned that the US "stood to suffer more, because Egypt could turn the whole region against the US, the same way it did with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s."

At any rate, Abu Zeid said, the government is well-prepared for the possibility of an aid cut, "and I think it has managed to develop a long-term strategy of self-reliance."

US economic assistance to Egypt amounted to $21 billion between 1975 and 1996. At first, the aid took the forms of repayable loans and *unrepayable grants. But as of 1982, most US* aid was provided in the form of grants that did not require repayment. The value of these grants has amounted to $15 billion so far.

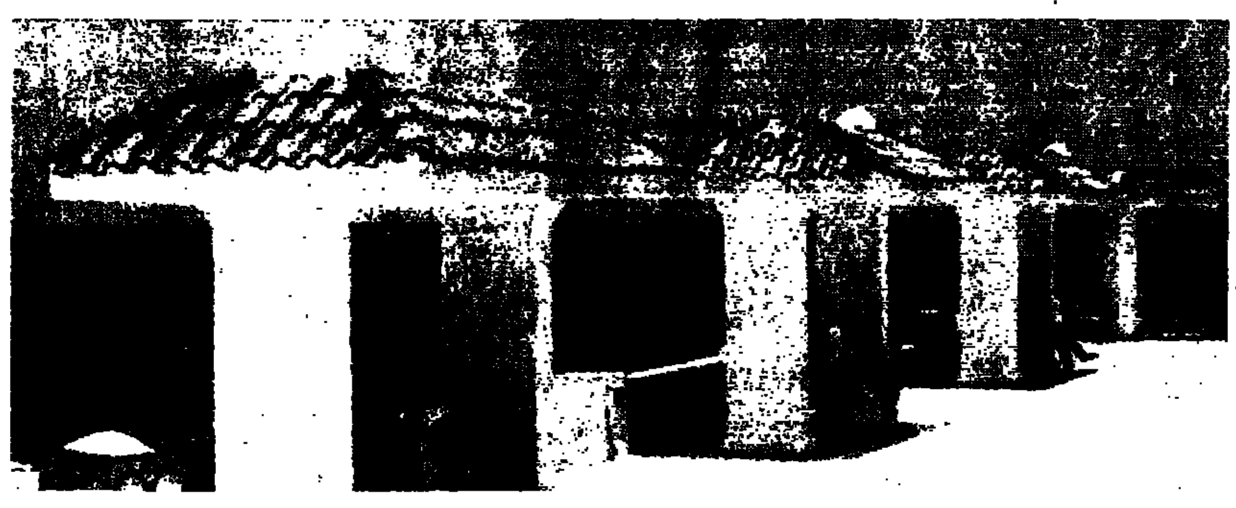


photo: Sherif Sonbol

SHELTERED BENCHES: In preparation for the city's high season, the Alexandria Governorate is giving the Corniche a face-lift. The old wooden benches have been replaced by new ones beneath gabled, tiled roofs supported by concrete columns. Dotted along the Corniche and clustered in some of the bays, the sheltered benches are already attracting families and couples out for a stroll.

However, seen from a seafront café, a car, or even one of the streets perpendicular to the Corniche, the concrete structures are something of a blot on the seascape. The new benches appear to be at odds with the governorate's recent policy of demolishing beach cabins to allow for greater access to sea vistas.

And, aesthetic considerations aside, critics argue that the considerable sums spent on erecting these structures could well have been channelled towards low-income and slum areas with virtually no infrastructure.

Integrating Arab tourism

An inaugural meeting in Cairo of the Council of Arab Ministers of Tourism endorsed the principles of cooperation and joint marketing. **Rehab Saad** attended

A founding meeting of the Council of the Arab Ministers of Tourism opened in Cairo on Monday, in line with a decision taken by the Arab League's Economic and Social Council. Eight countries were represented by their ministers of tourism and 12 others by ambassadors or Arab League representatives. Egypt's Mamdouh El-Beltagui was elected chairman.

The two-day conference endorsed the Council's working plan for the years 1998-2000, covering joint promotion, marketing and information as well as cooperation with international tourist markets. It also recommended the promotion of tourism between Arab countries, as opposed to exporting Arab tourism to Europe and America. The meeting underlined the importance of inter-Arab cooperation at international exhibitions and the encouragement of Arab investment in tourist projects.

Abdallah Hijazi, an assistant deputy minister in the Palestinian Authority (PA), asked the Council to provide support for celebrations planned in Bethlehem to mark the advent of the third millenium. "We will be holding celebrations for the year 2000 in Bethlehem and we are asking Egypt to cooperate with us in this connection," Hijazi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

However, with the birthplace of Jesus Christ, along with Gaza, and Jericho still encircled by Israeli tanks, and Jerusalem still under Israeli control, promoting tourism is no easy task. "How can tourism flourish in such an atmosphere, when my country is divided by barbed wire?" Hijazi asked. "Israel controls the movement of our visitors and the products coming to us. We are forbidden to restore any hotel in our areas, whereas the Israelis establish new hotels every day."

Arab tourism cooperation began in 1955 with the founding of the Arab Federation of Tourism in Jerusalem. The name was changed to the Arab Organisation of Tourism in 1980, but the organisation disbanded nine years later. However, with the recent boost in tourism, the Arab League's Economic and Social Council sought a formula of joint Arab action, and the Council of the Arab Ministers of Tourism was born. Beltagui described its creation as a "highly appreciated initiative."

Beltagui said that many Arab countries had devoted great attention to the tourism sector, building up infrastructure and encouraging investments. This resulted in a rapid growth of the Arab tourism industry, with the Middle East becoming one of the fastest growing markets in 1996, he said.

Integration between the various Arab countries, and not competition, was one of the main themes at the conference. "Inter-Arab tourism cooperation is a necessity," said Syria's Danho Dawoud. "We believe that tourism is a fertile field for Arab and international cooperation. The world is moving in the direction of economic integration and building up gigantic groupings. This should encourage us to close ranks and unite."

To promote inter-Arab integration, Beltagui underlined the importance of additional air routes, roads and railways to connect Arab countries. Accessibility is key, he said.

"The laws and regulations governing the movement of individuals and investments in the Arab world should also be revised in order to lure Arab capital to tourist investments," Beltagui added.

The conference underlined the fact that peace and stability are two important factors in the flourishing of tourism. They also stressed the importance of governments encouraging the private sector and providing it with the necessary infrastructure.

Stolen heritage homeward bound

A British court's decision to convict a smuggler of Ancient Egyptian antiquities may have opened the door for Egypt to regain part of its stolen heritage. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

A British court found Jonathan Tokeley-Parry guilty last week of smuggling Ancient Egyptian antiquities and sentenced him to six years in prison. Tokeley-Parry, an antiquities restorer, was convicted for smuggling artifacts, stolen from the Saqqara necropolis and the tomb of Hetep-Ka, 10km south of Giza.

The stolen objects will be sent back to Egypt. They include the false door of Hetep-Ka's tomb, a bronze statue of the falcon god Horus and a statue of the head of King Amenhotep.

"This case has opened the door for Egypt to demand the retrieval of priceless objects which have been stolen over the years and illegally smuggled to various parts of the world including the United Kingdom, Canada, Austria, Switzerland and Cyprus," said Ibrahim Hassanein, an Egyptologist who lives in London.

Describing London as the "world's clearing-house for stolen items," Hassanein said Egyptologists have often demanded a change in British law which does not penalise anyone who steals artifacts from a foreign country, as long as the crime was committed outside the United Kingdom.

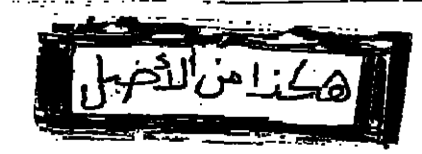
Mohamed Saleh, director of the Egyptian Museum, pointed out that there is an unwritten "regulation of cooperation" between the world's museums, under which a stolen object which a trader tries to sell to a museum should be returned to the country of origin. As an example, he said, the Boston Museum offered to return Egyptian objects which had been stolen from a tomb in Deir El-Gabrawi in Assiut. The Blady Hayn Museum in Germany also did the same, he said.

Tokeley-Parry was condemned after British police seized pictures of him disguising antiquities before smuggling them out of Egypt and then altering their features in order to sell them in London. Drawing on his expertise as a restorer, Tokeley-Parry displayed great professional skill in disguising the origin of objects, chipping off hieroglyphics to make them look like replicas. Another trick which he used was to put up a piece for auction, alleging it came from a private collection.

According to an official at the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Tokeley-Parry justified his crime by arguing that Egypt did not deserve to keep its heritage because it had neither the expertise nor the money to preserve it all. He insisted that these treasures would be better preserved in air-conditioned showcases in private homes than in cash-strapped Third World museums and stores.

But for Ali Murad, a professor of archaeology at Cairo University, Tokeley-Parry and other smugglers are simply motivated by greed. "They rape ancient sites and destroy our old civilisation to satisfy a rampant passion for money," he said.

Last February, a Cairo court sentenced Tokeley-Parry in absentia to 15 years hard labour for being part of a 12-man smuggling ring that included corrupt Egyptian antiquities inspectors.



Journalists united

Makram Mohamed Ahmed was elected chairman of the Press Syndicate by a sweeping majority, succeeding Ibrahim Nafie, who had served for two consecutive terms. **Shaden Shehab** cast her vote and covered the election


photo: Salah Ibrahim

A united front: Makram (l) locks hands with Nafie after election results were announced; Makram campaigning on election day

Makram Mohamed Ahmed, board chairman of Dar Al-Hilal publishing house and editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Al-Mussawar*, swept to an easy victory in Sunday's election for the chairmanship of the Press Syndicate. Ahmed, who survived an assassination attempt by Islamist militants in 1987, won by 1,791 valid votes to 1,945, giving him a 92 per cent majority.

Although Ahmed's dominance was a foregone conclusion, there had been fears that voter turnout might be less than the required quorum because the lack of real competition could prompt journalists to stay away.

However, the quorum — 50 per cent plus one vote of the total number of Syndicate members — was reached at about 3pm, after which Ahmed was soon surrounded by journalists who rushed to congratulate him. Between 9am and 5pm, 2,040 of a total of 3,350 registered journalists cast ballots, exceeding the required quorum by 364 votes.

Ahmed's four rivals won a total of 154 votes. Mohamed Emara, a journalist with *Al-Gomhuriya* newspaper, got 45 votes, Moussa Guindi, a journalist with *Al-Ahram* 42 votes, Mohamed Abdel-Alim, a journalist with the weekly *Al-Siyassi* newspaper 36 votes, and Mohamed Youssef El-Masri, a journalist with *Al-Ahram Al-Iqtisadi* weekly magazine 31 votes.

When Ahmed's victory was announced, outgoing chairman Ibrahim Nafie offered his congratulations to the applause of the assembled journalists. During his period as chairman, Nafie told the journalists, the Syndicate had "managed to safeguard its freedom and the freedom of speech and expression by getting Law 93 of 1995 repealed and gaining a distinguished press law in its place." Because journalists had presented a united front, Nafie said, the Syndicate "was able to surmount all internal and external problems... What is important is that we came out of all these crises more united than before."

Nafie said the Syndicate had been able to turn many "ideas and programmes" into reality, thereby ensuring the progress of the Egyptian press. The Syndicate had also expanded the health, social and cultural services it offers to members, raised their income and began the construction of a new headquarters, he added.

"I bequeath this trust to my successor and also to you, because it is a common responsibility," Nafie told the gathering. "I promise you that I will remain a faithful soldier in the army of this honourable profession. I will remain a colleague, friend and companion to all. I will open my heart and door to any person in need and to any person who has ideas for the benefit and progress of our beloved Egypt."

Ahmed in turn praised Nafie and the Syndicate's Council, particularly for its efforts to get Law 93 repealed. "We will work to promote the Syndicate's unity. We will stand united to repulse any aggression on the Syndicate, to defend the freedom of the press and to upgrade the standard of the profession," Ahmed vowed.

He added: "I will work earnestly to build on the achievements and gains made by Ibrahim Nafie."

Ahmed served two previous terms as Syndicate chairman — from 1989 to 1991 and from 1991 to 1993. Nafie won the 1993 and 1995 elections. Under the Press Syndicate's law, he could not run for re-election for a third consecutive term.

Ahmed, 59, escaped unhurt from an assassination attempt by Islamist militants in 1987 when gunmen opened fire on his car as he drove home from work through downtown Cairo. The apparent reason for the attack was a series of articles he wrote attacking the militants.

Ahmed began his career as a reporter for *Al-Ahram* in 1958. After serving as correspondent in Syria and then Yemen, he rose to become the newspaper's managing editor in 1973. He left *Al-Ahram* in 1985 to become board chairman of Dar Al-Hilal and editor-in-chief of *Al-Mussawar*, two posts which he continues to hold.

Sunday's elections ended a controversy on whether or not the ballot should take place. The controversy was triggered by discrepancies between two laws regulating the Syndicate's activities.

Court upholds genital mutilation

An administrative court's decision quashing a ministerial decree that banned the practice of female genital mutilation drew a mixed reaction: jubilation among Muslim fundamentalists and dismay in women's and human rights circles. **Dina Ezzat** surveys the response

Only a few days after the practice of female genital mutilation claimed the life of yet another adolescent, an administrative court struck down a Health Ministry order that banned the ritual from public and private hospitals and clinics. Judge Abdel-Aziz Hamad, responding to a request by a group of Muslim fundamentalists, ordered the immediate cancellation of the ministry's decree.

As the judge read out his decision on Tuesday morning, the courtroom became the scene of mixed reactions by supporters of the decree, which was issued a year ago by Health Minister Ismail Sallam, and the advocates of Sheikh Youssef El-Badri, who had pledged a persistent effort to have every Muslim Egyptian woman circumcised.

The judge said Sallam "misused his authority" when he issued the order because he did not have the right to ban the practice. This is the prerogative of parliament alone, the judge said.

Previous efforts to obtain a ban from the People's Assembly did not bear fruit because many conservative parliamentarians believe the practice is necessary for every woman.

"God is great. He is so mighty. May God be praised," El-Badri shouted after the court handed down its decision. "This is much better than we expected. We thought that the judge would order the temporary suspension of the decree and take some time before cancelling it altogether. But the judge was much wiser and more aware of the precepts of Islam than any of us," El-Badri said.

"This is a disaster. I am so shocked by this verdict," said Siham Abdel-Salam, a member of the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Task Force. "It is a slap in the face for the cause of women's reproductive health. It is proof that the anti-feminist tide in society is gaining the upper hand."

Members of the two groups became embroiled in a verbal clash in the court corridors.

The practice, commonly known as female circumcision, entails the partial or full removal of a young girl's clitoris, and sometimes the more brutal removal of the labia minora. Conservative Islamic circles believe the practice is a must for every Muslim woman because it checks her sexuality and thus eliminates chances of promiscuity. However, liberal scholars believe the practice is a custom that dates back to the early days of Islam, although it is not necessarily an Islamic prescription.

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, has ruled that the practice is not an Islamic custom, leaving it up to members of the medical profession to decide whether it is needed or not. The Grand Mufti, Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassel, issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) that although the practice is not an integral part of Islam, it should be permitted.

Women's and human rights groups have been lobbying and working at grassroots level to eliminate the custom.

An official at the reproductive health department at the Ministry of Health told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the court's decision "was completely unexpected. The minister is very disappointed, but he is not going to give up on this matter. This practice is a serious health hazard, it can have a destructive physical and psychological impact on the mutilated girl."

Earlier this week, an 11-year-old girl had a seizure and died after a doctor injected her with an anaesthetic as he prepared to perform the operation on her in his clinic in the poor neighbourhood of Manchiyet Nasser. Amal El-Bayoumi slipped into a coma and was rushed to hospital but she died there.

Police arrested the doctor, Abdel-Wahab Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, on charges of neglect and manslaughter and ordered an autopsy on El-Bayoumi to determine the cause of death.

But such incidents have not deterred supporters of the practice. "This practice is an integral part of Islam. We cannot reject it just because some Western people say it is barbaric. We have to have every Muslim woman circumcised," El-Badri said.

Following the court's decision, the two camps were getting ready for their next battle.

"We are going to appeal before the Higher Administrative Court within the coming 60 days," said Mohamed Abdel-Aal, one of the lawyers litigating for a ban in public and private clinics. "We don't know if we have a good chance but we have to try, and hope that we will win."

In addition, the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Task Force is planning to intensify its grassroots campaign to make sure that regardless of whether the practice is allowed or banned in hospitals, people will not seek the service.

In the other camp, an equal determination was apparent. Said El-Badri: "I am going to use the court's decision in the lawsuit I filed against the Minister of Education to have him remove from school books any mention of the negative impact of circumcision, and replace it with the correct teaching that circumcision is a must and that it should be practised."

Rumour destroys monk's house

Muslim villagers attacked a Coptic monk's house in the Nile Delta, allegedly after two members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood started rumours that he was converting it into a monastery. **Jailan Halawi** visits the scene


photo: Mohamed Attiya

The front entrance to the monk's house after the attack

The village of Grace in the Nile Delta governorate of Menoufiya was calm on Sunday, four days after its inhabitants attacked and nearly destroyed the house of a non-resident monk, pulling down its mudbricks with their bare hands.

Two policemen were posted outside the house, which originally consisted of two floors. The second floor was gone, and rubble littered the narrow street. The ground floor was heavily damaged.

According to security officials and residents, the unprecedented attack on 18 June on the home of Father Isaac El-Soryani was a spontaneous reaction to rumours, started by two members of the illegal Muslim Brotherhood, that the monk was converting the house into a monastery.

"We saw people running from the mosque to the monk's house following the evening prayer, shouting 'destroy the monk's house before he converts it into a monastery'," recalled Aziza Ramadan, a 14-year old girl.

Ahmed Eweiss, 20, said villagers saw Father Isaac coming to the house at night accompanied by Christian labourers from a nearby village. "We would see the monk sneaking into his house at night with mudbricks and building equipment. Although he said he was only renovating the toilet, people in the village suspected that he was building a monastery," Eweiss said.

Officials and residents said the drama began to unfold three months ago when the monk was appointed as custodian over Al-Soryaniya *awqaf* (religious endowment) in the village. Since he does not live in Grace, the monk began renovating the house in order to use it as his residence when he comes to the village to look after *awqaf* affairs, said Mikhail, a former assistant to the mayor. Village residents then complained to police that Father Isaac was building a monastery without having a government permit. As a result, Isaac was ordered by police to stop the renovation work until he obtained a permit, and a police guard was positioned outside the house.

The situation remained calm until the evening of 18 June when Salah El-Bouehi and Mohamed Shukri Fathallah took the mosque's microphone and urged villagers to destroy the monk's house. According to residents, the two are known for their affiliation with the Brotherhood.

In less than 10 minutes, almost all the village's Muslim inhabitants had gathered around the house, some dismantling its mudbricks as others stood watching. The police then arrived at the scene, dispersing the crowd and making 66 arrests.

According to security officials, Father Isaac lives in a monastery in the Natroun Valley. After he was made custodian of Al-Soryaniya *awqaf*, which includes several shops and the two-storey house, he made occasional visits to the village to collect the shops' rent.

The village of Grace is inhabited by nearly 12,000 Muslim families and 300 Coptic families. It has 12 mosques and one church. Residents insisted that Muslims and Christians had always maintained cordial relations. "We've been living together for ages as neighbours, brothers and friends. We never based our relationship on religion," said Mustafa El-Said. "We visit each other's houses, we eat together and we share our problems. Had there been any hard feelings between us, the monk would not have agreed to rent one of his shops to a Muslim butcher."

Ibrahim, 48, said that this incident would not change the fraternal relations between the village's Muslims and Copts. "We won't allow this act of violence to affect the good neighbourliness that has been achieved over the past years," commented another villager.

Although Menoufiya has not been the scene of previous sectarian strife, the incident has triggered worries of possible repercussions. As a result, officials have been organising "awareness and reconciliation sessions" between Copts and Muslims. In one of these sessions, the villagers apologised to the local priest and offered to rebuild the destroyed house at their own expense. "We may not agree to having a monastery but at the same time we refuse the use of violence against our Coptic brothers," one of the residents said.

Out of the 66 who were arrested, 58 were later released. The remaining eight, including the two suspected Brotherhood members, were remanded in custody for 15 days on charges of incitement to riot.

Torture claim investigated

THE EGYPTIAN Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) has welcomed "with great satisfaction" the attorney-general's decision to investigate claims that journalist Hamdein El-Sabahi and three other men were tortured by police.

El-Sabahi, two lawyers and a veterinarian were arrested on 17 June for allegedly participating in a solidarity campaign with tenant farmers who were protesting against the threat of eviction under a new landlord-tenant relationship law.

The EOHR said it filed a complaint on Sunday with the attorney-general after it was informed by El-Sabahi's wife that the four suspects were stripped of their clothes in a prison cell, beaten and whipped by police guards.

Acting on this complaint, Counsellor Hanafi Hassan of the attorney-general's office summoned the four suspects for a physical inspection, the EOHR said in a statement issued on Tuesday. The inspection showed that El-Sabahi might have suffered a broken rib. There were also bruises on his back. Suspect Mohamed Abdu might have suffered a broken thumb. There were also bruises on the chests and backs of the other two suspects, Hamdi Heikal and Suleiman Fayyad. All four were subsequently referred for a medical examination, the EOHR said.

The organisation demanded the immediate release of the four men on the grounds that the charges levelled against them are closely related to their right to peaceful self-expression. If the claim that they were tortured proves to be true, those responsible should be put on trial, the EOHR said.

El-Sabahi, who ran in the last parliamentary elections but failed to win a seat, is a Nasserist activist, journalist and director of the Al-Watan Al-Arabi (Arab Homeland) Information Centre. He was arrested in Cairo while the three others were rounded up in the Nile Delta province of Qalyubiya after allegedly participating in a peasants' rally.

They were charged with propagating ideas, and possessing literature, that opposed the basic foundations of the government regime and incited hatred and contempt of it.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Firing up Lebanon-first

Israeli rhetoric on its readiness to withdraw from south Lebanon was coupled with bombing attacks by the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army north of Israel's self-proclaimed security zone. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

Recent statements by Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai on his country's readiness to withdraw from its self-proclaimed security zone in south Lebanon coincided with the heavy shelling of areas outside this area by the Israeli ally, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

The shelling earlier this week was a clear violation of the April 1996 agreement reached by Lebanon, Israel and Syria and sponsored by the United States and France following Israel's major military offensive against Lebanon last year. It raised the question of whether Israel and the SLA were on the verge of a conflict, or were working together to pressure Lebanon to reach a peace agreement with Israel without necessarily waiting for developments on the Syrian-Israeli peace track.

"We have no interest in Lebanon. We want to get an agreement [with Lebanon] that will ensure security and peace for the residents of north Israel and the citizens in south Lebanon," Mordechai said in statements earlier this week. "We will continue to act on the one hand to reach an agreement and, on the other hand, we will continue to support our troops in the south."

During a visit to France last week, Mordechai reportedly asked Paris to mediate an agreement with Lebanon which would allow Israel to withdraw its troops while ensuring Israeli security. But French officials are likely to reject such a proposal. One senior official was quoted as saying that France's policy was "to work for a comprehensive solution that would also include Syria."

For the Lebanese government, Mordechai's proposal was no different from an earlier suggestion by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, known as "Lebanon First". Both proposals are based on the premise of solving the Israeli-Lebanese question first without necessarily reaching a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Both the Lebanese and Syrian governments rejected the idea and Syrian President Hafez Assad said, "We want Lebanon and Syria first."

Lebanon argued that Israel was obligated to withdraw from Lebanon anyway, under the Security Council Resolution 425, and that this did not require any negotiations on a full peace treaty as Israel demanded. Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bouez said recently that his country would never object to an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, but this pull-out should not be conditional.

In the deteriorating situation in south Lebanon this week, the SLA militia fired two artillery shells on Maghdouche, two kilometres south of Sidon. The shelling came one day after the head of the SLA militia, Antoine Lahad, threatened to bomb populated centres in the southern Lebanese cities of Sidon, Nabatiyeh and Tyre to avenge an earlier spate of resistance attacks by Hizbullah guerrillas in Jezzine inside Israel's self-proclaimed security zone.

Some Lebanese analysts said the bombing was a unilateral move by the SLA militia reflecting their differences with Israel, particularly following Mordechai's statements on his readiness to withdraw from the security zone. But others downplayed this possibility, saying the SLA was fully controlled by Israel, and that the two were taking part in *an attempt to provoke the Lebanese government and to turn residents of* the security zone against it.

Hizbullah officials, meanwhile, denied that their recent attack on the SLA in Jezzine, in which four people were killed, violated the April agreement.

"The people killed in the bombings were militia officers and members," said Naem Qassem, deputy secretary-general of Hizbullah.

But the SLA and Israel insist that the bombs killed three civilians and an SLA officer.

The cease-fire agreement, officially called an understanding, bars attacks against civilian targets but sanctions operations against military personnel.

Hizbullah's Secretary-General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah refuted the SLA argument that his group's latest attack in Jezzine was targeting Christians and not just SLA personnel. Nasrallah told supporters that "the recent events in Jezzine have been blown out of proportion. *Jezzine is occupied*, and the *resistance targets occupying forces* and their allies in Jezzine just like in other areas. We have not singled out Jezzine and we are not against civilians there."

Lahad also accused the Lebanese army based in the south of helping Hizbullah to plant the bombs in Jezzine. "TV footage of the bomb explosions was taken next to a Lebanese army checkpoint. If the security forces plan to continue to carry out such operations we may have to strike them in the same way," he said.

The latest Hizbullah attack was condemned by residents of Jezzine who held sit-ins and protest marches to display their opposition. "We will not allow the security situation to deteriorate further. We have suffered enough. Civilians must be protected," one local official said during demonstrations.

"Seventy thousand people used to live in Jezzine. Now only 6,000 are left. Thousands fled to safety. We cannot allow this to continue. This is a plot to make us leave," the official added.

A delegation from Jezzine visited Lebanese leaders following the Hizbullah attack. The town's deputy in parliament, Slyman Kenaan, told the *Weekly* that they have briefed the Lebanese officials on the situation in Jezzine and requested support for its residents.

Kenaan played down the idea of growing friction between Jezzine residents and Hizbullah, and referred to Hizbullah fighters as "our brothers".

Hizbullah's Qassem said he understood the concerns of residents and adding that he has advised civilians not to use the same roads which Israeli collaborators take. "Hizbullah only targets collaborators. They do not detonate devices if they are not sure their targets are not civilians," he said.

Lebanese security sources argued that the SLA militia might be feeling isolated following reports that Israel might be contemplating redeploying from the west of Jezzine — which includes the villages of Kfar Falous, Roum and Bkassine — as part of a phased withdrawal from Jezzine to the Litani river. "There has been speculation the Israelis might pull back. Jezzine is the furthest part of the occupied zone from *Israel and is hard to resupply. Morale is low* among the militia members and they are not an organized force. This makes them an easy target for Hizbullah," one security official said.

Nasrallah said Hizbullah would welcome a *Jezzine* pullback. "We have no problem if they pull out and the Lebanese army takes over security in the area. Withdrawal is our aim and this would be a victory for us in our struggle to liberate all territory," he said.



ANOTHER INTIFADA? The PA would like to keep protests within limits, but these scenes captured by *Khaled Zighari* in Hebron, throw doubt on its ability to do so

Recognising the Gaza game

Israeli settlements and the crippled peace process are not the only challenges facing Palestinians. Graham Usher investigates the Palestinian Authority's actions

On the bank of a sand dune near Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip, a power play is being fought between the Palestinian Authority (PA), Jewish settlers and the Israeli army. But this confrontation is only the tip of an iceberg that extends much further than the confines of this desolate outpost of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Several hundred Palestinians seek shelter from the sun under six tents adorned with banners protesting that "There can be no peace with settlements". On a ridge above them, three Israeli army jeeps patrol the space that separates the protesters from the edge of Morag, one of 11 small Jewish settlements that comprise the Gush Katif settlement bloc in southwest Gaza. The Israeli soldiers are armed. And so are the Palestinians.

The skirmish over Morag began on 28 May when Jewish settlers extended the perimeter of the settlement by erecting a barbed-wire fence on Palestinian land. Palestinian officials argue that under the Oslo Accords this is an illegal seizure of land. Some Palestinians suspect this is the opening move in a mammoth Israeli land confiscation which, if unchecked, could segregate Rafah from Khan Younis, the second largest city in Gaza.

On 12 June, around 1,000 Palestinians pulled down the fence, sparking clashes with the army that left two Palestinians wounded from live ammunition and one dead from tear gas inhalation. Three days later, another clash flared after settlers from Gush Katif's Netzer Hazani settlement threw a fence around 70 dunams (about 17 acres) of Palestinian land near Deir Al-Balah in the middle of Gaza. One Palestinian was injured by settler fire.

Despite the tension, the protest at Morag has an orchestrated feel, led and controlled by the PA. The tents are sponsored by the PA's Sports and Youth Ministry, the PA's National Guidance Committee and the PLO's veterans of the Palestinian Revolution. Between them mingle khaki-clad officers from the PA's police or National Security forces. The masses are conspicuous by their absence. One reason is the PA's wish to prevent this relatively minor skirmish from becoming a full-fledged confrontation. But there are others.

"We have recognised the game," says Kamal, a Palestinian from Deir Al-Balah. "In September, Gaza lost 31 people in the confrontations. For what? For nothing. The protest in Morag is to polish the PA's prestige. It's not coming from the people."

Three years after Yasser Arafat's return to the Gaza Strip, the preoccupation among most Palestinians is less the national struggle against Israel than the more basic struggle for social and economic survival.

Palestinians still acutely feel the reality of Israeli occupation through its now permanent closure of the Gaza Strip. Salam Ajluni, an economist working for the UN's Special Coordinator Office in Gaza, calls the closure "the single largest impediment to Palestinian development".

Since Yitzhak Rabin slapped a general closure on the Occupied Territories in March 1993, Palestinians in Gaza have lived with average unemployment and underemployment levels of 30 per cent, both considerably higher in the refugee camps, where over half of Gaza's 950,000 Palestinians reside. According to Ajluni, only 22,000 Gazans currently work in Israel, compared to the approximately 80,000 who worked there before the Intifada in 1987. The rest of Gaza's 180,000-strong labour force scramble for jobs in a low-wage economy where the real purchasing power of salaries has declined by 14 per cent over the last year. The upshot — according to a report by the Palestine Economic Research Institute (MAS) — is a society in which up to 25 per cent of Palestinians in Gaza live at or below a poverty line of $500-650 per year.

But Gazans have directed their anger as much at their own new regime as at the occupation. The PA has acted to alleviate Gaza's economic distress, which is politically unsustainable, but at an enormous cost to the indigenous economy. The PA's primary instrument to offset unemployment has been the creation of a massive public sector of 78,000 employees, with 35,000 of these employed by one of the PA's 12 different security forces. During Oslo's initial phase, much of the donor money earmarked for infrastructure development in Gaza was diverted into operating expenses for the PA's burgeoning bureaucracy. Today, the bureaucracy is funded by an aggressive PA tax regime which, in the opinion of Gaza economist Salah Abdel-Shafi "is no different from the tax system imposed by the Israelis during the occupation".

Palestinians in Gaza are currently taxed at the same crushing rates as under the Israelis, with a small business subject to a 26 per cent rate and a PA employee to around 23 per cent. Nor have the methods of tax collection changed, except that now it is the PA police instead of the Israeli army that enforces them.

"In Gaza, Palestinian businesses pay taxes in advance," and in the absence of clear fiscal laws, "it is a Palestinian police officer who assesses the rate on the basis of a company's anticipated profits," says Abdel-Shafi. The result — as under the Israelis — is massive tax evasion "punished" by ever more ruthless and arbitrary forms of tax collection.

The other result is the emergence of a political culture where mismanagement and corruption flourish. The most obvious sign of this is the emergence of 27 monopolies in the Palestinian autonomous areas that control the imports of such basic commodities as fuel, flour, building materials and cigarettes. Controlled by a handful of PA figures with particularly close ties to Israeli security figures and contractors, revenues from the monopolies are used to consolidate the PA's rule in the West Bank and Gaza by paying for the PA's bureaucracy and enriching the PLO's old and new political class.

In recent weeks, Yasser Arafat has moved to quell public disquiet over corruption, authorising an auditing report on the PA's budget and declaring Al-Bahar — one of Gaza's largest firms, with interests in cement, computing services and advertising — "a publicly owned company". But most Palestinians feel the gesture is too little, too late — just like the protests at Morag.

How to deal with the US

Arabs have only themselves to blame for being knocked around by Washington, participants in a Cairo seminar asserted this week. Rasha Saad attended

In a two-day seminar titled "The Arab Nation and the United States: Opportunities and Limitations," Egyptian and Arab diplomats, political experts and academics discussed means of improving US-Arab relations and obstacles facing that goal.

Several questions were raised at the seminar organised by Cairo University's Centre for Political Studies and the Arab Studies Institute, a private research institution. These questions focused on what the Arabs seek from the US and whether they should regard Washington as a faithful ally and, therefore, sense disappointment when it does not perform its aspired role in the peace process. Also considered was whether or not it is possible to regard the US as an equal partner in a balanced relationship based on mutual interests.

The participants in the seminar agreed that since power and not justice is the rule of the game in international relations, it is only natural that the US would seek to further its own interests while dealing with the Arab countries. Thus, the Arabs should do the same, once they have defined their common interests and agreed on a common strategy on how to pursue them.

But the core problem between the US and the Arabs, according to the participants, was that the two sides do not enjoy a balanced relationship. It goes without saying that the balance of power in this case is in favour of the US. The US, as one nation and as world superpower, has always maintained a single, clear and consistent policy in its relationship with the Arabs. On the Arab side, 22 governments are involved, each with its own priorities and method of dealing with Washington. This leaves the Arab side open to divisions and differences over means of reaching common targets.

In this context, Hassan Nafaa, political science professor at Cairo University, made the point that one of the most important differences between the Arabs and the US is that American policies are defined by political institutions whereas Arab policy-decisions are made by individuals. Hence Arab policies are apt to be influenced by individual interests and sentiments.

Nafaa also rejected the view that the US is biased against the Arabs. "It is true that both the US Administration and the American people have a negative view of the Arabs. However, the same applies to countries like China and Japan. The difference here is that these countries react as nations that have the capability to defend themselves and impose their will," he explained.

According to Ahmed Abdel-Halim, director of the Middle East Studies Centre, the US willingness to defend its security interests in the region is one of the ways Washington has managed to maintain the upper hand in its relations with the Arabs. Since US interests merge with those of several Arab states, the latter are now dependent on US protection. In the US view, the stability of the oil-rich Gulf countries is a prime objective, together with the protection of Israel, which should remain the sole regional power with military capabilities superior to that of all Arab countries combined.

Considering that the state of relations between the Arabs and Israel influences the way Washington deals with the Arabs, Abdel-Halim argued that the manner in which the US Congress and other officials have dealt with the situation in the Middle East recently reflects the fact that Israel's national security has superseded the protection of Middle Eastern oil resources as a priority for the US.

To prove his point, Abdel-Halim cited a seminar held in Washington in 1985 to *discuss the conditions* that would prompt the *US* to use force in the *Middle Eastern* region. The American participants said that the use of force would be "likely" if the former Soviet Union were to threaten the flow of oil from the Gulf region. But were there to be a threat to Israel's security, the participants added, such military intervention would be "definite."

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, a prominent political analyst, agreed that the Middle East was no longer a top priority in US foreign policy. "I believe that the US no longer believes that the Middle East is in need of its attention, especially since both its security and that of Israel are not threatened," he said.

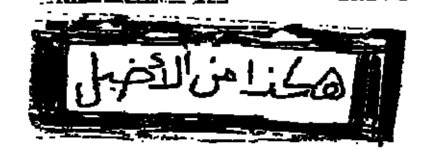
In a more optimistic tone, some participants offered suggestions on how to build a more balanced relationship with the US. They generally advised the Arabs not to take the US bias towards Israel as inevitable, but instead to work at changing it and look for concrete ways to achieve that target.

Among the suggestions made was that the Arabs should try to better understand American society and its inner workings. This could be achieved by holding conferences and establishing research centres focusing on the issue of improving US-Arab relations.

Participants in the seminar also devoted special attention to the role Arab-Americans could play in lobbying for Arab demands in the United States and creating a better understanding of the Arab cause. The Jewish lobby, for instance, is very powerful in the US not only because of its political influence, but also because it is deeply involved in domestic American politics. Thus, Arab Americans should do the same and be supported financially and morally by the Arab countries and peoples.

In that context, former Egyptian ambassador to Washington Abdel-Raouf El-Reidi pointed out that besides the fact that Arab-Americans are fewer in number than Jewish-Americans, Arabs face a problem of identity. While the Jewish community in the US maintains a strong sense of identity, Arab-Americans are more willing to assimilate into mainstream American society. "Every Jewish American is born to find himself or herself inheriting a Jewish identity, supported by their synagogues, feasts, restaurants. The Arabs, on the other hand, come to the US with the aspiration of becoming part of the American dream and melting in American society."

El-Reidi also called for a dialogue with the American Jewish lobby because it also includes moderates who believe that Israel should have a more flexible policy towards the Palestinians.



No place for Refah

Turkish premier designate Mesut Yilmaz faces the challenge of putting together a government that would end months of political instability in the country, Omayma Abdel-Latif reports from Ankara

As Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP), continues to hammer out a deal with Turkish party leaders to form a new government that could win a confidence vote in parliament, many cast doubts over the ability of the 49-year-old politician to attain that goal.

Following the resignation of Necmettin Erbakan from his short-lived tenure as prime minister to avoid a confrontation with Turkey's powerful army, the Islamist leader hoped that his ally, Tansu Ciller, would be asked to form the new government. This would have assured that the Refah Party would remain in the cabinet at least until new elections are held, according to the terms of a deal with Ciller.

Yilmaz, who served twice as prime minister for short periods in 1991 and 1996, met nearly all leaders of Turkish parties since he was asked to form the government. The only exceptions were Erbakan and the leader of a small Turkish party who had stated that he would support a government led by Erbakan and Ciller. That announcement had come at a time when members of Ciller's True Path Party were defecting to protest her alliance with Erbakan.

On Tuesday, Yilmaz met his long-time rival, Ciller, amid appeals from secular Turkish parties that the two agree on a compromise to allow for the formation of a stable government after nearly a year of tensions. But deep personal differences between the two politicians might not make such agreement possible.

Both Erbakan and Ciller criticised President Suliman Demirel's decision to ask Yilmaz to form the new government, describing it as "undemocratic". Before stepping down, Erbakan had provided the Turkish president with a list of parties ready to support a Refah-True Path alliance. But the list was ignored.

Yilmaz' designation was seen by many observers as a victory for the secularist army which has signalled its opposition to any new government that would include Erbakan's Welfare Party. The army has also called openly for a clamp down on what they see as the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey. However, in selecting Yilmaz, Demirel followed the tradition of naming the party leader with the largest number of seats in the assembly as prime minister.

Several True Path members have reacted bitterly to the president's decision to ask Yilmaz to form the government without discussing the plan with Ciller first. "After Erbakan presented his resignation to Demirel last Wednesday, the mechanism was set in motion to make sure that Refah will never come to power again," said Hasan Ekinci, deputy chairman of the True Path Party.

Some circles in Turkey feel that Ciller is responsible for putting Refah in power, thereby causing what they see as "great damage" to the country. These circles feel, therefore, that she should never be given a chance to lead the country again. "The bulk of society has no sympathy for Ciller who is seen as a corrupt politician who entered into a coalition with the Islamist party to avoid being tried [for alleged corrupt practices] by the Supreme Court," said one observer.

Meanwhile, an angry Ciller strongly criticised Demirel's designation of Yilmaz. She described it as a coup d'état by the president and ruled out any future coalition with the ANAP. "We have no agenda item like Mesut Yilmaz," she said.

To obtain a parliamentary majority, Yilmaz, who reportedly enjoys the support of two left-wing parties and a small centre-right party, must get the support of about 10 defectors from Ciller's Truth Path Party, since he could not persuade Ciller to bring her party into his government. Yilmaz is confident that he will win the support of parliament for his government. "The government that I establish will be one which will receive a vote of confidence in parliament," Yilmaz told reporters on Monday.

One observer of Turkish affairs confirmed that Yilmaz has a good chance of forming a government because of the growing fear of the army's involvement in Turkey's politics.

Within Turkish political circles, it is a widely-held belief that from now on, all paths will lead to an early election to overcome the political crisis. "Regardless of what kind of government gets formed, it seems inevitable that an early election will be held," wrote Gengez Cender, a commentator for the secular-oriented daily *Sabah*.

A rising star, against all odds

A new political star, neither an Islamist nor an army general, is rising in Algeria. Louisa Hanoun, a secondary school teacher, raised the banner of the poor and won four seats in parliament. Amira Howeidy spoke to her in Algiers



Of the 11 women to make it to the Algerian parliament, Louisa Hanoun stood out most after she led her Marxist-Trotskyist Workers Party to victory by winning four seats in Algeria's latest parliamentary elections.

"She made it, that Hanoun. Good for her," cheered prominent Algerian politician and key figure in the former ruling National Liberation Front (FLN), Moheideen Amimour, upon hearing the results of the 5 June parliamentary elections. "I was going to vote for my party's candidate, of course, but changed my mind at the last minute and voted for Louisa Hanoun instead."

"The people in Algeria say that there are only two 'real men' in this country, [Islamic Salvation Front leader] Abbass Madani and Louisa Hanoun," said another observer of Algerian politics who requested anonymity. In the male-dominated and conservative Algerian society, referring to Hanoun as a "man" means that she is as strong as men and capable of doing as well, or better.

With her charismatic personality, bold opposition stances and the support of her party members, Hanoun fought hard in the first parliamentary elections held in Algeria since the powerful army establishment intervened in late 1991 to cancel the results of the first round of elections when it became clear that the FIS would win a majority.

Although four seats in a 380-member parliament might seem insignificant, observers argue that Hanoun's triumph lies in the fact that she was able to win at all despite her radical Marxist political ideology and her gender, in a country where women enjoy only marginal political representation.

Originally a secondary school teacher, Hanoun first joined the ranks of the Algerian Communist Party, later renamed El-Tahadi or the Challenge Party. But she bolted in 1989 to form her own Trotskyist Party. Hanoun, who is fourty three, has also published various books in French on Algeria. *Une autre voix pour l'Algerie* (Another voice for Algeria) written in 1996 remains one of her most frequently quoted works.

Furthermore, Hanoun enjoys significant popularity in both political circles and the Algerian street. Many registered voters in the capital Algiers, where Hanoun was running, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Workers Party leader was, ironically, their choice this year just as the FIS had been in 1991.

"I voted for the FIS in 1991. But this year I chose Hanoun because she is a great woman. I watched her on TV, she has guts," a 67-year-old man standing in front of a polling booth told the *Weekly*.

At the Aknoun constituency in Algiers, a 39-year-old engineer and his veiled wife explained that "since the FIS was banned, there has been no real opposition." But Hanoun, he said, with her fiery speeches during the election campaign, "voiced the real hopes and thoughts of the Algerian people." Even though she is a Trotskyist and a woman, the *Weekly* asked? "The FIS leaders accepted her, so why shouldn't we?" he snapped.

To the surprise of many observers, Hanoun's relationship with the FIS is very good, contrary to many other secular groups who fear the influence of religious fanaticism and oppression of women if the FIS and other radical Islamists were to succeed in coming to power. Some observers even argue that the Workers Party's success was partly due to FIS backing.

But Hanoun, or the 'iron lady' as some of her supporters like to call her, believes that without the votes of the lower-middle class workers, she would not have made it to the parliament. "I know, for example, that the firemen, the lowest ranks in the police and the employees in the customs department voted for us," Hanoun told the *Weekly*. "Our platform is clear. We are against privatisation [of the public sector] and the mass layoff of workers. That is why all these people voted for us."

She added that the four seats her party won "were not the real figure. We would have gotten three or four more seats, if no rigging had taken place during the elections."

Hanoun, together with six representatives of Algeria's major political parties, issued a declaration on the Algerian crisis in 1995, known as the Rome Declaration because the parties held their first meeting in Italy. The declaration called for a return to the constitution, the non-interference of the army in political affairs and the abrogation of the decision to ban the FIS, in addition to the release of all imprisoned FIS members.

During her election campaign, Hanoun was allowed to appear on state-run Algerian TV. She used that forum to boldly repeat the contents of the Rome Charter, thereby triggering the anger of many Algerian officials. "She is a devil," snapped an official of the Algerian Foreign Ministry when asked to comment on Hanoun. "She played on the FIS issue and she did it well. Now, she is inside the parliament with four seats. She couldn't have dreamed of such an achievement," he told the *Weekly*.

Commenting on why many of those who voted for the FIS in 1991 voted for her on 5 June, Hanoun said: "It is all very simple. In 91, the FIS was the opposition. Many voters supported them because they wanted to get rid of the regime, to punish them. Now we represent a strong opposition and that is why many former FIS supporters are now our supporters."

Shortly after the announcement of the election results, Hanoun's office, in a modest two-storey building in the working class area of El-Harash, was bustling with dozens of local and foreign reporters. Despite a weary face, Hanoun smiled and asked the reporters to wait in the adjacent room for their turn to interview her. "She is a star now and we just have to wait for her," commented an Italian TV journalist who had been waiting for 45 minutes to meet Hanoun.

Workers out of Jordan

Egyptian workers are returning from Jordan at a rate of 2,000 per day, following a clampdown by the Jordanian government on what it labels "illegal workers". Lola Keilani reports from Amman

The number of Egyptian workers in Jordan is expected to decrease by nearly 50 per cent in the next three weeks as a three-month "reprieve period" allowing illegal workers to leave the country without being fined or facing prison sentences draws to a close.

The Jordanian government has offered similar reprieve periods over the past two years in order to reduce the number of illegal workers, but these efforts have not been successful.

According to Jordanian officials, however, this will be the last chance for illegal workers to leave Jordan without serious legal consequences. Officials added that this latest campaign is primarily aimed at creating more jobs for the high percentage of unemployed Jordanians.

According to an Egyptian diplomat in Amman, at least 2,000 Egyptian workers have been returning to Egypt every day since the reprieve period started. The number of Egyptian workers in Jordan is roughly estimated at 230,000, while an estimated 320,000 of Jordan's 1.4 million labour force are unemployed.

Of the 230,000 Egyptians working in the Kingdom at the time of the clampdown, nearly 100,000 had already obtained official work permits. Meanwhile 75,000 others managed to take advantage of the government reprieve to "adjust their working conditions" in accordance with Jordanian law. The rest are illegal workers, and those returning home presumably belong to this category.



Egyptian workers gathering in one of Amman's main squares — *photo: Al-Ahram*

Jordan is determined to reduce the number of Egyptians working in nearly all sectors of the Jordanian economy. The major exception is the agricultural sector, where Egyptian labour is greatly needed because Jordanians disdain farm work.

An owner of a farm in Alghour, which is the main agricultural region, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The majority of the Jordanians refuse to work in the agricultural sector. Therefore we need the Egyptian labour force to work the land during the day and act as farm guards at night."

The majority of Jordanian employers prefer Egyptian workers because Jordanian workers insist on working for only eight hours a day as mandated by Jordanian labour laws.

A hotel owner in the southern Jordanian town of Wadi Mousa said that he would rather employ Egyptians than Jordanians because "they put in more working hours for less pay".

Ali Mohamed, an Egyptian worker from the Delta city of Tanta, told the *Weekly* that he works as an office boy at a newspaper in Amman for around 12 hours a day, and that he earns a monthly salary of only $120, a sum which would never be accepted by a Jordanian worker.

Jordan's "culture of shame" has contributed to the increase of Egyptian workers. Many Jordanians of tribal background look down upon manual labour.

A number of Egyptians who intend to leave the Kingdom told the *Weekly* they hoped they would be able to find jobs in Egypt after hearing of a recent improvement in economic conditions and the opening of new projects in industrial cities.

"A friend who left Jordan sent me a letter saying that he had just received five *feddans* (acres) of land in Al-Ameryah to work on," said one Egyptian. He added that he also intends to apply for the same once he returns home.

Another Egyptian said he was leaving because he preferred to depart "with dignity" rather than be deported or forced to pay a one Jordanian dinar ($1.5) fine for each day he spends in Jordan after the expiry of his work permit.

Many of those interviewed said they took the chance of coming to Jordan without an agreement with a Jordanian employer, as Jordanian law stipulates, because the trip cost only around LE500. Jordan and Egypt have an agreement to allow their nationals to move freely between the two countries without a visa, unlike most other Arab countries, particularly those in the oil-rich Gulf region.

A Jordanian Ministry of Labour official affirmed that the government will now strictly apply the labour laws, and request that guest workers without a valid work permit leave the country.

The Jordanian Ministry of Labour said it will implement intensive inspection campaigns and will hold those who illegally employ workers responsible for any and all violations.

According to some Jordanian observers, however, the whole issue of Egyptian workers involves a domestic factor since the government is determined to cut the size of the over-inflated bureaucracy by finding jobs for the surplus civil servants in the private sector.

Recently, vocational programmes have started to teach Jordanians some of the skills that Egyptians have. Moreover, television programmes are under way to tackle the "culture of shame" syndrome which, according to Prime Minister Abdul-Salam Majali, is inhibiting young Jordanians from doing manual work.

Can dual containment be contained?

The US defence secretary confirmed during his Gulf tour that Washington is committed to the "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran despite signs of discomfort from the Gulf countries. Rasha Saad reports

In his first official five-day visit to the Gulf region since taking office a year ago, US Defence Secretary William Cohen met leaders and military officials of nearly all Gulf countries. The only exception was Qatar because Cohen met its Emir, Hamad Ben Khalifa Al-Thani, in Washington shortly before his departure to the region.

One message that Cohen aimed at delivering to the Gulf leaders was that Washington continues to view Iran and Iraq as major threats to the region's security and to the free flow of oil. Thus, the US will maintain its policy of so-called "dual containment" towards the two countries. This policy aims at isolating Iraq and Iran, preventing them from making international trade deals and receiving foreign investments to pressure their governments into changing what the US considers their "aggressive policies".

In the case of Iraq, there seems to be no hope of removing US and international sanctions against Baghdad. American administration officials make it clear that they have no way of dealing with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and openly admit that they are keen on seeing him toppled.

Although many Arab countries have expressed their desire to see the sanctions against Iraq loosened, if not lifted, they were more forceful in expressing their opposition to the US policy towards Iran, especially since the latest Iranian presidential elections were won by moderate President Mohamed Khatami. When Cohen was touring the region, top officials in nearly all Gulf countries sent messages to the Iranian leadership confirming their "brotherly relations" with Tehran and desire to enhance bilateral cooperation. Qatari leader Al-Thani had expressed similar reservations during his meeting with US President Bill Clinton in Washington and told him that the American policy of "containing" Iran is not useful.

According to observers, Gulf leaders are better able than Washington to recognise the influential role Iran plays in the region. If tensions were to increase between Washington and Tehran, these Gulf countries would be the ones to pay the price, and probably a heavy one.

For his part, Cohen charged that Iran is building a threatening arsenal of weapons. He claimed that Tehran recently tried to acquire more advanced missile systems and is working on developing its chemical, biological and even nuclear capabilities. He added that Tehran is boosting its military arsenal in order to be able to close the Strait of Hormuz, which oil exports from Arab Gulf countries pass through before going to the rest of the world.

As for the results of last month's presidential elections, Cohen said that Washington is "hopeful but skeptical" about policy changes in Tehran. According to him, Washington needs "concrete, demonstrable evidence" of a change in Tehran's course if the US policy of containment is to change. However, he set very stringent terms before a dialogue between Washington and Tehran could start. Iran would have to stop its support of Islamist militant groups, support the Middle East peace process and refrain from developing its nuclear capability. Cohen stressed, however, that his country is not heading toward a clash with Iran unless the latter starts one.

Arab observers believe that the US is exaggerating the dangers posed by Iran's regime so that the Gulf countries would continue to regard the US as their sole protector and continue buying US weapons and tolerating American military presence in the area.

The US has 22,000 troops in the Gulf. More than 4,000 are stationed in Saudi Arabia and over 2,000 in Kuwait. The US also maintains a fleet of warplanes to monitor the no-fly zone in south Iraq, in accordance with UN Security Council sanctions. Another 1,000 marines are located in Bahrain, the headquarters of the US navy in the region.

The United Arab Emirates, which is in conflict with Iran over three strategic Gulf islands, is reported to be very concerned about reports of the Iranian military build-up. As a result, the UAE is negotiating with the US, Britain and France for the purchase of military aircraft worth $6 billion. But even UAE officials are reportedly against increasing the level of tension with Tehran.

On Tuesday, an Iranian newspaper criticised the Gulf countries for allegedly failing to use Cohen's tour to protest the recent Congress resolution considering Jerusalem as "the eternal and undivided capital of Israel." Iran's state radio also criticised the US military presence in the region and said that the Arab countries will indeed lose for "moving in the wake of an oppressive and hegemonistic power like the US".

During his tour, Cohen visited US troops in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. His message to them was that they are playing a vital role in defending US interests in the region by standing ready to deter "countries like Iran and Iraq who are determined to drive the US out of the Middle East."

Encounter with Mumia

Gamal Nkrumah meets death row prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal in a prison deep in rural Pennsylvania

"The secret of life is to have no fear," Mumia Abu Jamal told me, quoting Kwame Nkrumah, when I was introduced to him in the State Correction Institution Greene Country, Pennsylvania. "I am an avid reader of Nkrumah's works, and this is among his most meaningful sayings for me personally today," he said, smiling by way of explanation. He was happy to meet me, a son of one of his ideological mentors. I had travelled with a small band of dedicated Mumia supporters from our base in Philadelphia and across the rolling hills and expansive plains of eastern Pennsylvania, to the rugged mountainous country of the southwestern part of the state, to the small town of Waynesburg, where Mumia is incarcerated. We left Philadelphia in the small hours of the night and arrived seven hours later at the formidable and foreboding double barbed wired-walls of SCI Greene.

"In the struggle, prison is inevitable. It is one of the many expectations and sacrifices," Mumia again quoted Nkrumah, as he instantly noted how my gaze was transfixed at his handcuffs. We spoke to each other through a thick glass screen. We had to speak up. The guards were civil, even pleasant. I was thoroughly searched, and could not take any of my personal belongings with me. Even my wallet was left behind. Visitors are not permitted to give the inmates any presents, be it food or books. The corridors leading to the visiting area for death row inmates, where Mumia was patiently seated, were clinically clean. Everything was glistening white with patterns of soothing shades of soft blue and turquoise. The doors and windows, too, were of the same soothing soft blue hue.

It became clear that I was addressing an especially articulate and intelligent man. Mumia was knowledgeable, too. The deep baritone voice of the heavy-set man sitting opposite me from behind the glass screen talked about the history of racial hatred and civil strife in Philadelphia, the city of Brotherly Love. He reminded me that 61 per cent of all so-called "hate crimes" in America are racially motivated. His was a "rare and courageous voice," as African-American novelist Alice Walker once said of him. In fact, just a week before my visit, Walker had been to see Mumia at SCI Greene. Mumia told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that in Pennsylvania the death penalty was applied disparately, arbitrarily and freakishly and, therefore, violates America's federal and state constitutions.

Born and bred in Philadelphia, Mumia grew up in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood and from the tender age of 15 was in the cross hairs of the notoriously brutal Philadelphia cops. He knew no other life but that of political struggle. Mumia was a co-founder of the Black Panther Party and became minister of information in 1969. By the time he was 26 in 1980, he was elected president of the Philadelphia chapter of the Association of Black Journalists. Today, he spends much of his time in SCI Greene studying for his master's degree.

A small party including Julia and Malcolm Wright, the daughter and grandson of the celebrated African American writer Richard Wright, David Du Bois, stepson of the distinguished Pan-Africanist W E B Du Bois and myself stood outside the mayor's office in City Hall, Philadelphia, on 5 June to demand a new trial for Mumia. Leading the parade was the diminutive Pam Africa, a diehard Mumia supporter and member of MOVE, a militant leftist organisation that emerged in the early 1970s in Philadelphia. MOVE members adopted the surname "Africa", wore their hair in dreadlocks, Rastafarian style, and led a radically independent and alternative lifestyle based on an environmentally-friendly philosophy. "What we did not know at the time was that Mayor Ed Rendell's rise to power was closely associated with the repression of MOVE. Rendell was district attorney (DA) at the time of the police assault on MOVE in 1985," explained Africa.

According to Juan Gonzalez, a columnist for the *New York Daily News* and co-host of Democracy Now on Pacifica Radio, it was Mumia's denunciation of police brutality in the press that sealed his fate.

Mumia has been closely associated with MOVE from its inception. He covered the concerted campaign of harassment by the Philadelphia police, who broke up demonstrations led by the group and arrested scores of its members. MOVE headquarters was located in an area of prime real estate. On 8 August 1978, the police assaulted the premises. In the early 1980's many MOVE members lived in a house at 6221 Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia. In violation of police regulations and federal laws regarding the transfer of explosives, the police obtained over 37 pounds of the powerful military explosive "C-4". And on 13 May 1985, Philadelphia's then first black mayor, Wilson Goode, ordered a full-scale assault on the Osage Avenue premises using Uzi's, M-16's, Browning automatic rifles, a 2mm anti-tank gun and .50 calibre machine gun. In addition, the mayor used helicopters to bomb the MOVE residence. Goode became notorious for being the first mayor in history to bomb his city's civilian population.

Africa told the *Weekly:* "The prosecution's star witness was Cynthia White, who according to other witnesses was not even on the scene on the night of 9 December 1981 when Mumia was critically wounded by a gunshot in Philadelphia's red light district. Lying next to him was police officer, Daniel Faulkner. White, is the only witness who claimed Mumia had a gun in his hand. White continually changed her story and volunteered to testify for the police because she had 38 previous arrests for prostitution and three cases pending at the time of Mumia's trial. In return for her cooperation, White was given the privilege of continuing to work as a hooker, with plain-clothes police assigned to protect her as a witness."

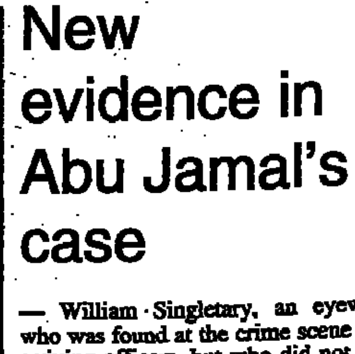
Then there were the new confessions of Veronica Jones, another former prostitute who was a witness at Mumia's trial. Jones retracted her earlier testimony, saying that she was bribed by the police to lie and that she can no longer live with the lies while an honest man's life hangs on her words.

Was Mumia framed by the powers that be because of his militant past? Do the authorities want Mumia executed for political reasons?

Speaking to the *Weekly*, Mumia said: "An examination of the ballistic evidence reveals that no effort was made by the Philadelphia police department to determine if my licensed .38 pistol had been fired on 9 December. The Police Department's own medical examiner concluded that Faulkner's fatal head injury had been made by a .44 calibre bullet. The two witnesses who had been at the Jefferson University Hospital where Faulkner died, and who testified that I shouted defiantly that I had shot Faulkner dead, turned out to be Faulkner's former partner and best friend and a hospital security guard, who was also a friend. And, the prosecution's claim that I was shot while standing over Faulkner is not consistent with the pathologist's report describing the downward trajectory of my chest wound. The angle at which I was shot makes it impossible that I was shot while standing over the fallen officer, as the prosecution claims." Mumia added that he wants a new and fair trial, and is not interested in commuting the sentence to life. "That will not do," he said.

Attorney Leonard Weinglass, the chief counsel for Mumia's defence, recently warned that a new death warrant for Mumia might be signed this summer. Weinglass has successfully defended political cases such as Mumia's stemming from movements of leftist militants and civil rights in the United States. He served as trial counsel in such widely publicised cases as the Chicago Seven and the Pentagon Papers trial. Weinglass defended a series of death penalty cases, similar in nature to Mumia's, in Georgia, Alabama and Washington State. He also assisted in the defence of Angela Davis.

So, will Weinglass be successful in getting the authorities to accept a re-trial for Mumia? We do not know. But as Cornell West, one of the most distinguished African American academics noted, "Like the most powerful critics of our society, from Herman Melville... to Eugene O'Neil, Mumia forces us to grapple with the most fundamental question facing the country: what does it profit a nation to conquer the whole world and lose its soul?"



New evidence in Abu Jamal's case

— William Singletary, an eyewitness who was found at the crime scene by the arriving officers, but who did not testify at the trial, testified that he saw an individual — who was neither Mumia nor his brother — shoot Officer Faulkner and then flee the scene. The police, however, prevented Singletary from testifying unless he changed his story. He was eventually forced to leave Philadelphia as a result of police threats and harassment.

— Another witness, Debbie Kordansky, who also did not testify at the trial because she "didn't like black people" and "didn't want to help the defense," was subpoenaed last year and acknowledged that she had initially told the police that she saw someone run after the shooting had stopped. This person could not have been Mumia, who was unconscious and critically wounded.

— Still another witness, Robert Chobert, who did testify at the trial for the prosecution and identified Mumia as the shooter — admitted that he had originally told the police that the shooter had run away, but changed his story at the trial — six months later. Chobert explained that he had been driving a cab without a licence, which led him to seek the assistance of the prosecutor handling the case.

— Veronica Jones is yet another witness who disclaimed her original testimony. At the trial, Jones denied seeing anyone run from the scene of the shooting. But she came forward in 1996 and testified that she had told the police within a week of the shooting that she did, in fact, see two men run from the scene after the shooting had stopped. She changed her story at the trial because the police threatened her with a 10-year prison sentence, should she help Mumia's defence. At the time, she was only 20 years old and faced the loss of her three infant daughters, if sent to prison. After hearing this testimony, Judge Sabo ordered her jailed on an old bad check warrant. She was led from the courtroom in handcuffs.

— The prosecution's contention that Mumia's gun was the murder weapon was also rebutted by evidence that was equally persuasive in arguing for a new trial. The medical examiner's report, which was entered into the official record for the first time, specifically noted that the bullet removed from Officer Faulkner's brain was a .44 calibre bullet. Mumia's gun, a .38 calibre, could not have fired such a bullet.

The accumulated weight of this new information devastated the prosecution's main thesis: that Mumia had to be the shooter since only he, his brother and the officer were present. Judge Sabo found none of the above either sufficiently credible, or where conceded as true by the prosecution, persuasive. In his opinion for denying Mumia a new trial, he adhered completely to the prosecution's theory of the case as presented at the trial in 1982 — disbelieving or disregarding the new evidence.

Extracted from the memorandum prepared by Leonard Weinglass, chief counsel in Abu Jamal's defence.

The path of racism

While the major networks tend to be especially sensitive to racist stereotyping of most nationalities, Arab bashing is alive and kicking in the US media, writes **Jack Shaheen** from Washington

This month Home Box Office (HBO), the largest US television network screening feature films, aired *Path to Paradise*, an overtly racist movie. The plot tells the story of the World Trade Centre bombing of 23 February 1993, when several Arabs planted a bomb that killed seven people and injured many.

Prior to the movie's release, HBO executives said they were sincerely concerned about how *Path to Paradise* would affect the average viewer's perception of Arabs. Consequently, HBO officials travelled to Washington, DC, to meet with this writer, members of the American Muslim Council (AMC), and the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in August and November of last year. Those attending the meetings were impressed with the apparent candor of the network executives, who seemed genuinely concerned about stereotyping. From the outset, they declared that they had no intention of defaming America's Arab Muslims in any way.

ADC members thought there was nothing objectionable about fictionalising this particular story. They, however, expressed their concern that the film may potentially vilify the entire community. They told the network executives that the film should clarify that the bombing was the work of extremists who happened to be Arab Muslims; but that like most other Americans, Arabs and Muslims condemn terrorism.

Attending Arabs also told the network executives that pervasive and widespread stereotyping in the media has unleashed racist violence against Arab Americans. One AMC member recounted that in the wake of the April 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, US journalists initially rushed to report that the alleged suspects looked "Middle Eastern". As a result, eight mosques were burned down and vandalised, and more than 300 hate crimes were committed against Arab Muslims in the US.

To avoid negative stereotypes about Islam, we said that it is crucial not to equate Islam with violence. At the meeting, I suggested that racist media images function as powerful agents of influence, teaching us whom we should avoid, ridicule, and hate. Such images have major effects on everyday life. One such example was Warner Brothers' 1996 hit, *Executive Decision* — a skyjacking drama that portrayed grotesque Arab Muslims carrying lethal nerve gas. Audiences whistled and clapped, as Americans terminated the villains. Four days after the film's release, employees of a Denver radio station burst into a mosque and began harassing worshippers.

However, despite the network executives' seeming goodwill at the meetings, they informed us later that none of our "constructive suggestions" could be incorporated into *Path to Paradise* — because the film was allegedly already "in the can". The meeting turned out to be nothing but a public relations ploy, superficial razzle-dazzle giving the appearance of concern.

In the film, the Arab and Muslim communities have direct links with domestic terrorism. Instead of showing American Muslims empathising with the victims of the bombing, *Path to Paradise* claims that Islam champions violence and that Muslims loathe Christians and Jews. Throughout, stereotypical villains function as clones, bearing a striking resemblance to Hitler's infamous SS.

Even before the opening credits, we see film clips showing Muslims about to launch a holy war against the US. The chanting of verses from the Holy Qur'an in the background seems to encourage the violence.

An FBI agent declares, "The sheikh and his followers... they think we're the devil. They want to destroy our society." Policemen and agents refer to Arab Muslims as: "son-of-a-bitch", "bastard", "ass" and "asshole."

"Are you ready to go into battle, brother?" asks a Muslim. "It is the path to paradise," says another. "Now, I'm a warrior for Allah."

Towards the end of the film, an FBI agent warns viewers: "We're looking ahead to more explosions. This ain't over. Others will come and take their place." The final frames show a terrorist, screaming: "Next time we will bring them both down [the Trade Centre's towers]." Again, the director highlights the scene with chanting from the Qur'an.

Such crude scenes induce viewers to accept reel Arab images in lieu of real ones. However, Muslim-bashing is not a new phenomenon. In a 1916 novel entitled *Greenmantle*, John Buchan wrote: "Islam is a fighting creed, and the *mullah* still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in the other."

Only weeks ago, South Carolina State Board of Education member Dr Henry Jordan echoed Buchan's words, albeit with more virulence. "Screw the Buddhists and kill the Muslims. Islam is a cult," he fumed, proceeding to declare that Muslims are "hell-bent upon conquering the world by the sword. It's written in their doggone religious book."

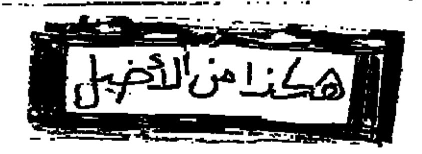
Clones of Buchan's fanatical *mullah* and Jordan's racist rhetoric pervade Western media systems. Since the mid-1980s, more than two dozen television movies, i.e. *Hostage Flight* (NBC 1985), *Terrorist On Trail* (CBS 1988), *Hostages* (HBO, 1993), and now, *Path to Paradise*, have displayed the Arab Muslim bogey. In May, the Associated Press (AP) exploited prejudices in a series of articles called "Jihad USA". The essays consider "possible" scenarios in which Arab Muslim "militants" and "terrorists" could commit acts of violence in the US.

Despite HBO's conscious demonisation of Muslims in *Path of Paradise*, the network seems to avoid racial and ethnic stereotyping in other productions. Following the consultations in Washington, DC, network executives could easily have taken steps to change the film's racist message. As they failed to do so, racial harassment of Arabs will most likely follow the screening of *Path to Paradise*. This is why the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee presented HBO with its Escalating Intolerance Award on 13 June.

Finally, HBO executives should ponder the following question: Had a few white Americans — like Americans of Italian, Jewish or Irish descent — bombed the World Trade Center, wouldn't they have made every conceivable effort to inform viewers that this fringe group does not represent the majority?

In 1951 comedian Milton Berle, at the height of his fame, told his Arab-American friend Danny Thomas, "There is no room in this business for prejudice." No room indeed.

The writer is a CBS News consultant on Middle East affairs.



'A mile high, an inch deep'

At the world leaders' meeting in Denver, the US strategy consisted of waiting for concessions, writes **Hoda Tewfik** from Washington

The three-day summit meeting in Denver ended on Monday with none of the participants having addressed the controversial issue of globalisation. The summit, however, sent out the message that world policy is dominated by a single superpower: the United States. In effect, the Americans managed to lead the show and President Bill Clinton used his leverage to stall European plans for a global environmental policy and militate against so-called "enemy" states like Iraq and Iran.

Following lengthy deliberations on protecting the environment from the "greenhouse" effect, the US pushed the Europeans to delete all references to timetables and emissions limits from the final draft — keeping the document deliberately vague and postponing the discussion of specifics till the next high-level meeting in Kyoto, Japan, in December.

German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who faces an important "green" voter constituency back home, complained about the absence of stronger language on the environment — noting that leaders of the same countries had agreed on stronger measures five years ago. His remarks reflected European frustration with the American reluctance to crack down on global polluters. French President Jacques Chirac also expressed his frustration that the final statement carried no specific and binding emission targets by stating that "the Americans are the worst polluters."

Continuing his trade sanctions crusade, Clinton pressured Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the European Union (EU), Japan and Canada to maintain their tough position towards Iran and called on the latter to renounce "terrorism."

"We call on all states to avoid cooperation with Iran that might contribute to efforts to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities, or to enhance chemical, biological or missile capabilities," read the final communiqué on Iran.

In reference to maintaining UN sanctions against Iraq and Libya, the world leaders promised to enforce all Security Council resolutions against the two countries. Clinton managed to enlist Yeltsin in his anti-Iraq coalition, although Yeltsin had earlier threatened to use his veto at the Security Council to stop further sanctions against the besieged Arab country. The Russian president's sudden change of heart, however, proved to be a trifle embarrassing when his foreign minister held a press conference, confirming that his country would never accept further sanctions against Iraq.

On the peace process, Clinton resisted calls from Chirac and other leaders to get more involved in getting the Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. "For all of us who are outsiders, including the United States, it is not always self-evident what the most effective way [is] to exercise whatever influence you have," the US president said.

Notwithstanding his apparent restraint, Clinton seemed to make demands on the Palestinians. "The Palestinians will have to return to security cooperation with the Israelis and will have to manifest an opposition to terrorism that is clear and unambiguous, to unauthorised injury or murder of innocent civilians and [will have] to continue in the peace process," he said. Clinton's remarks about the Israelis, on the other hand, were subdued. "As for the Israelis, they have got to find specific things that can be done that show that there's a commitment to Oslo, in fact, not just in words, a commitment to getting this process going."

The final communiqué's section on the stalled peace process, was a bit hackneyed. "The peace process faces a crisis, and we are determined to re-inject momentum into it. Restoring the sense of security and confidence among Israelis and Palestinians is essential," stated the document.

Commenting on the summit, the venue of which was one mile above sea level, one observer said: "It was a mile high and an inch deep."



A radiant Boris Yeltsin confirmed Russia's return as a world power at the G-8 meeting in Denver. Greeted as a star, Yeltsin has come a long way from a similar meeting in Munich, five years ago, when he sat at the aid table and was barred from participation in formal talks *(photo: AFP)*

The politics of hunger

Millions of North Koreans face starvation. Who's to blame? **Faiza Rady** asks

"I look at this country not in a political sense... Women, children, the elderly — they don't know anything about four-party talks. They want to eat, they want to live."

Tony Hall
US Democratic Congressman from Ohio on the North Korean famine

"More than five million North Koreans are on the brink of starvation and could die in the next few months unless food aid arrives," an official of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies reported last Friday. Such was the latest warning of the threat posed by a severe famine in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

After a three-day visit to North Korea last month, American Congressman Tony Hall said that people in the North Korean countryside are starving, underweight and "rapidly descending into the hell of a severe famine." Hall visited the countryside north of the capital Pyongyang, a region particularly devastated by two consecutive years of disastrous floods that have destroyed some two million tons of grain and damaged 400,000 hectares of cropland.

According to UN officials, North Koreans currently receive a daily ration of 320 calories, less than 20 per cent of the requirement for a normal, healthy person. "Evidence of slow starvation on a massive scale was plain wherever we made an effort to look," said Hall, adding that conditions had dramatically worsened since he visited North Korea in August last year. Hall described his visit to a hospital that had no medicine and was so cold that he could see his breath. He also spoke of "shockingly underweight children", many of whom had lost their mothers to malnutrition. "I doubt one of them will live to see this year's harvest," he said.

The Seoul daily, *The Korean Times*, wrote last week that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has reported a 75 per cent decrease in consultations in clinics and hospitals across the country and that hospitals have run out of food and medicine. The main diseases currently plaguing the population are diarrhoea, infections and malnutrition-related illnesses. "Many of these diseases are almost harmless if you have the necessary medicine and equipment, but if you cannot treat them, they can cause serious health problems," said Michael Tailhades, a Federation physician.

Other visitors to the famine-ravaged country echoed the bleak tale. "The situation over the last two months has gone from alarming to desperate," said Ole Gronning, the Pyongyang Red Cross representative. While touring the countryside, Gronning has visited hundreds of families whose kitchens are empty except for bowls of grass and roots.

"It is a famine in slow motion," said Tun Myatt, a director of transport and logistics for the UN World Food Program (WFP). "People are eating seaweed, cakes made with ground-up tree bark and other 'alternative foods' that have sustained people who otherwise would already have died of hunger," said Myatt.

Last April, the North Korean authorities reported that they had begun to bury children who had died from hunger. According to UNICEF, the North Korean Health Ministry told UN workers that 134 children had died of malnutrition in 1996. Nationwide, 50 per cent of hospitalised children are half the normal weight for their age group. According to health authorities in the Changang province, 38 per cent of the children in Huichon City are neither gaining height nor weight, nine per cent suffer from severe weight loss and about two per cent show symptoms of Kwashiorkor — a disease characterised by a potbelly and changes in skin pigmentation — or marasmus, the gradual loss of flesh and strength. Both diseases are caused by severe malnutrition.

In a desperate attempt to alleviate the crisis, the government mobilised the armed forces last month to assist farmers in harvesting this summer's grain crop. Provincial authorities are also helping the government raise much-needed hard currency, made scarce by the US economic boycott clamped on this embattled socialist country. Local authorities collect scrap iron, sell it to neighbouring countries and use the proceeds to buy food for the people.

Since the collapse of North Korea's main trading partners, the socialist bloc and particularly the Soviet Union, North Korea has suffered the dire consequences of the US embargo. Despite the fact that Washington signed an agreement with the DPRK to partially lift trade sanctions in exchange for a North Korean nuclear programme freeze in October 1994, the US has failed to deliver. Since the signing of the accord, Washington has permitted a sole company — the giant cereal manufacturer, Cargill — to negotiate business deals with the DPRK.

As in the case of "enemy countries" like Cuba, Libya and Iraq among others, the US boycott means international economic isolation since Washington threatens other countries with sanctions should they dare to break the embargo.

Despite the gravity of the food shortages, international observers have been impressed by the fair distribution of government rations, which they attribute to the egalitarian quality of the country's socialist regime. "Because of the equal distribution of food, everyone gets a little. It's not a question of a lot for the few, it's a little for all," explained Kathi Zellweger, director for international cooperation at Caritas, Hong Kong.

Other commentators praised the people's discipline and hard work despite their exhaustion. North Korea ranks among the most educated nations, with an equal literacy rate of 99 per cent for both males and females — a rare achievement worldwide. "If we have to grade them, I suppose one would have to give them an A plus for effort. The level of agricultural activity is intense. Every scrap of land is being used," explained WFP's Myatt.

He also commented on the North Koreans' ingenuity in the face of extreme hardship. "They eat bark and leaves," said Myatt, "but not in the way that we would imagine anybody eating bark and leaves. It is done in a fairly systematic, fairly sophisticated way. Stalks of corn, cobs of corn, empty pea and bean pods... and whatever else that in most other countries would have been thrown away, or used as animal feed, is now being milled into powder," he explained.

If the cash-strapped economy is to survive the famine, North Korea needs immediate emergency grain shipments of 2.36 million tons. So far, only 43 per cent of the country's request for foreign aid has been met, reported the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). "If nothing is done now, thousands of people will die before the summer," said Christiane Berthiaume, the spokeswoman for the WFP. But beyond emergency aid, the country also needs international help to restore the devastated arable lands and cope with potential floods in the future. This implies "additional aid from the world community to do a lot of work such as afforestation and embankment," added Berthiaume.

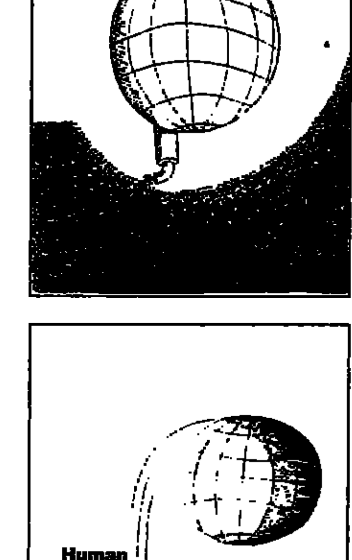
Many observers believe that the South Korean and American reluctance to respond significantly to the famine is politically motivated. Although Seoul finally delivered some 50,000 tons of emergency food aid via China last week, this is only a drop in the bucket in view of the country's need. "It looks like the international community hesitates to provide aid to a socialist government without considering that innocent people are dying," commented political analyst Isabel Vichniac.

Do the US and South Korea want to starve Pyongyang into submission, while waiting on the sidelines for the famine-stricken population to topple the socialist regime and then forcefully "reunite" the two Koreas under the aegis of the free market banner, backed by the US military? Such a strategy would explain why Washington is dragging its feet. At any rate, American officials have been characteristically blunt in expressing their conviction that the North Korean government will eventually fall.

Commenting on the deteriorating situation in the North, General Gary Luck — the highest-ranking US military commander in Seoul — reassured a congressional committee last year that Pyongyang's collapse "was not a question of *if*, but *when*." Using a somewhat more virulent tone during his visit to South Korea last month, Defence Secretary William S. Cohen urged the "decaying regime in Pyongyang to end its failed Stalinist system, and *soon*."

Beside the wishful thinking and occasional saber rattling of American top brass across the Panmunjom border — a no-man's land demarcating the 1953 armistice line, Pyongyang believes that the US uses the aid card to impose its agenda on the "four-way" peace talks. Planned to promote the signing of a peace treaty between North and South Korea, negotiations over the four-way talks to be held between the two Koreas, China and the US stalled when Pyongyang accused the Americans of linking aid with the peace treaty.

"Although the United States announced that it would not link humanitarian assistance with the four-way talks, it has not removed our apprehension that the United States may use food as a political weapon," announced a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson. Pyongyang also expressed its concern over the strong American military presence in the South — a potential and potent threat to the North. In this context, DPRK leader, Kim Jong-il, reminded his compatriots last week that "aggression and plunder constitute the nature of imperialism."





Refugees abused

IN ITS annual report published last Wednesday, documenting human rights abuses in 151 countries, Amnesty International deplored the "tragic situation" faced by refugees around the world. "Human rights abuses and the global refugee crisis are inextricably linked," stated the London-based human rights organisation.

The report said the number of refugees had doubled over the last decade — now totalling some 15 million people — but that "the international regime that is supposed to protect refugees is in crisis".

Amnesty's Secretary-General Pierre Sane explained that parties other than the governments directly responsible for human rights violations in their own countries caused the massive refugee flows in 1996. "Foreign governments directly or indirectly fueled conflict in places such as Central America, Afghanistan and Colombia that caused human rights abuses — and then failed to take responsibility for the tragic situation they caused," said Sane.

Citing Colombia as an example, the report denounced the US government for supplying training and military assistance to security forces, which have joined pro-government paramilitary forces in carrying out more than 1,000 extra-judicial executions — instituting a reign of terror that made thousands of Colombians flee their homes.

The report also accused Northern governments of denying entry and protection to millions of men, women and children fleeing the violence at home. It cited the example of Algeria, a country from which thousands have tried to escape political violence that has resulted in the killing of more than 50,000 civilians since 1992. "European and other Northern governments have advised their citizens against visiting the country," the report said, adding that "these same governments often refuse Algerian asylum-seekers, arguing that they face no serious threat in their country."

Dead or alive?

AMIDST recent conflicting reports of Pol Pot's capture or demise, rumours about the fate of the notorious and elusive former Khmer Rouge leader abounded. However, on Tuesday Cambodia's chief negotiator with Khmer Rouge rebels stated that he had seen Pol Pot, who is held by dissidents of his own movement. The Cambodian government expects that the rebels will soon hand him over to stand trial.

Speaking with reporters on Sunday, First Premier Norodom Ranariddh said that Pol Pot was now "very sick and receiving oxygen to help him breathe." The premier added that Cambodia will ask the United Nations to organise an international tribunal to try him for crimes against humanity.

Average Cambodians were quick to condemn Pol Pot, who headed a four-year reign of terror ending in 1979. "For me, he must be executed," said taxi driver Lo Lan, 48, whose father and grandparents died under the Khmer Rouge. The regime caused the death of an estimated two million Cambodians through starvation, overwork and systematic torture and execution in the infamous attempt to turn the country into an immense agrarian labour camp.

The Khmer Rouge were overthrown by an invasion from neighbouring Vietnam in 1979, but the group waged war against the pro-Hanoi government of Hun Sen and later against the uneasy coalition between the Marxist Hun Sen and Ranariddh's royalist party, which came to power after the 1993 elections.

Whether dead or alive, "Pol Pot should not be the only scapegoat," said Christophe Peschoux, author of *The New Khmer Rouge*. "All others in the leadership against whom there is evidence of massive human rights violations should not be allowed to participate in Cambodian political life," warned Peschoux.

Killing fields in Congo

ONE MONTH after Laurent Kabila realised his decades-old ambition of overthrowing Zaire's dictator Mobuto Sese Seko, reports of killings and abuses by his army continue to mount. Residents of Uvira, a Lake Tanganyika port 1,000 miles east of the capital Kinshasa, say Kabila's troops are no different from the notoriously brutal forces of his predecessor.

A group of residents, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisal, said that Kabila's soldiers opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators in mid-May, killing an estimated 275 people. The residents also blamed the army for a series of disappearances and killings that have taken place since Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire moved in last year.

"The soldiers go from house to house, and they leave with people who are never seen again," said a local Red Cross official. The initial high hopes for democratisation and improved conditions have dwindled in Uvira. "The people here were very happy when Kabila came," said one woman, "now we think it will be no different."

Big Macs under threat

With their tax exemptions withdrawn, Egypt's fast food chains may have to trip the budgetary fat, or halt operations altogether. **Mona El-Fiqi** reports



A new investment law, which strips some tourism establishments of pre-existing tax incentives, has fast food restaurants steamed and up in arms.

Under Investment Law 8 of 1997, tax and tariff exemptions offered to tourism ventures under a 1973 investment law, have been repealed. This move, according to Mahmoud El-Kassiouni, acting chairman of the Chamber of Tourist Establishments (CTE), will have negative repercussions on international fast food chains such as McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and House of Donuts.

The five year tax breaks and incentives afforded under the 1973 investment law, said El-Kassiouni, were abolished "overnight, without warning". As a result, several groups of Egyptian and international investors are now in danger of losing millions of pounds because they have to pay taxes and customs duties. These new fees would raise their operating costs by roughly 50 per cent, said El-Kassiouni, who heads the chamber's fast food section. The CTE has petitioned the prime minister and the ministers of tourism and finance to reconsider the new law.

Restaurateurs are not alone in expressing their concern. Many tourism officials see this new legislation as counterproductive, and argue that tax and tariff exemptions are essential for restaurants.

Adel Radi, head of the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) explained that the tourism industry includes hotels, restaurants and supporting infrastructure, and all deserve equal treatment.

"The exemption previously given to restaurants should not have been abolished," stated Radi. "It could have been reduced to a level lower than that for hotels, but there should be an incentive for restaurants."

Among the many complaints voiced about the new law is that it is being applied retroactively. Owners of new restaurants who applied for a tourist licence, and who ordered equipment from abroad for their establishments, will be obliged to pay taxes on their imports.

Ahmed Gouda, executive member of the Franchise International Corporation, (FIC) operator of the Popeyes chain of restaurants in Egypt, said that he had to pay nearly LE1 million in taxes on imported kitchen equipment needed for the five branches of the restaurant in Egypt. The Popeyes chain has been operating in Egypt since last January, using a temporary licence.

According to CTE records, there are more than 60 restaurants which are being run under temporary licences. These licences are granted by the Ministry of Tourism while the restaurants apply for and receive the 34 requisite licences from various authorities — a process which can take up to one year.

By applying the new law to restaurants operating under these licences, Gouda explained that the various outlets will have to pay customs duties on the imported equipment, as well as year-end taxes — neither one of which was factored into the equation when feasibility studies were conducted before the first branch opened in Egypt.

In response to these obstacles, the FIC, which signed a contact to build 17 Arby's fast food outlets in Egypt, has put on hold plans to further expand their operation.

Unfortunately, this option could likely backfire on investors in other international franchise restaurant chains. These investors, said El-Kassiouni, have paid millions of dollars in franchise fees for the right to operate these chains in Egypt.

"They are committed to certain development schedules, whereby they have to open 20 or so restaurants over the next five years," he said. If they fail to adhere to these schedules, they could find themselves in breach of contract with the parent company, and forced to pay compensation.

So, what happens if the law is not amended? Muthanna Al-Durrah, general manager of Al-Nowair Food Staff Company, which is managing the Arby's chain in Egypt, said that if the new law is implemented, then the company may be forced to liquidate its business.

As important as the damage this law will do to the fast food business in Egypt, Al-Durrah believes it will have more far reaching consequences, such as serving to discourage foreign investors for whom legislative stability in a country is near the top of their list of priorities.

Further compounding matters is that much of the trust and confidence on which more investments are secured is based on word of mouth. And, as one member of the International Food Franchise Association (IFFA) put it, "At a time when Egypt is running costly investment promotion campaigns, and organising huge international investment conferences, this new law was entirely unexpected."

The IFFA estimates that there are branches for 28 international fast food chains operating in Egypt, with total investments exceeding LE15 billion. "The government should be nurturing this industry, not paralysing it," said the IFFA official.

But if the law is not amended, said El-Kassiouni, then the next likely question on the mouths of investors will be, "Where will the hammer fall next?"

Additional reporting by ***Rehab Saad***

WB impressed but undecided

A World Bank mission found that several development programmes were promising, but has so far refused to put its money where its mouth is, reports **Amira Howeidy**

A World Bank mission visiting Egypt earlier this month said it finds "good potential" in the new Southern Valley Development Programme but still needs a lot of time to decide on the kind of help it can provide the Egyptian government in the mega-project.

According to World Bank official Jean-François Barres, the Bank's decision to offer financial contribution for the programme might take approximately three years.

Elaborating on this point, Salah Dargouth, the Bank's division chief, explained, "The new Southern Valley Development Programme includes many projects which need to be studied carefully." World Bank experts have been assigned to visit the Valley and to amass information on each project, he added. Last February, the representatives of the Bank arrived in Egypt on a fact-finding mission in the New Valley region.

But while Dargouth asserted the Bank's "commitment" to the projects, he did not specify the nature of the contribution likely to be provided.

"We are still in the process of learning about the programme," he stated. "The process of analysing will come later."

The Bank's reluctance to offer firm assurances until now, however, is doing little to put to rest the debate surrounding some of the key projects, such as Toshki. Since its initiation, the Toshki project, which is part of the New Southern Valley Development Programme, has received as much criticism as it has praise. The project's supporters have, in the past, claimed that the World Bank welcomed the project, and will, therefore, provide $45 million in loans for its implementation. Critics, however, assert that the February World Bank mission did not find the project to be beneficial, and has "refused" to finance it.

But according to Dargouth, both critics and proponents have done little so far but circulate unsubstantiated rumours. "None of this is true," he stated. Besides providing technical assistance for the programme as a whole, the Bank mission has yet to decide on its next step. The mission, stated Dargouth, will issue its report on the visit in three months, and "then we will sit with the government and see."

Toshki, however, does not seem to rank high on the mission's list of priorities. "Toshki, to us, is only one of the many projects we are discussing," noted the Bank's division chief.

The new Southern Valley programme was but one of the mission's four objectives during their five-day visit to Egypt. Also on their list was to assist the government in preparing its 1997-2017 Agricultural Strategy Plan, prepare for the negotiations concerning the Marketing and East Delta projects, the appraisals of the Sohag and Pumping III projects and to finalise agreements on the implementation arrangements for a pollution abatement project. These projects will be co-financed by the World Bank, the UN Development Programme and the Egyptian government. The FAO will also participate by providing experts in various fields.

The pollution abatement project, which was launched in 1996 at a cost of $48.7 million is aimed at assisting in the implementation and compliance of Environmental Law 4 of 1994.

Toshki in the balance

Mona Qassem surveys the Toshki project's realities and possibilities

Few mega-projects, save for the construction of the High Dam, have prompted such blitzes of publicity and waves of controversy as the Toshki canal project, which is intended to channel millions of cubic metres of water from Lake Nasser, behind the High Dam, through the desert, towards the Kharga Oasis in the north, ultimately providing much needed water for the communities springing up in the southern part of the New Valley.

But what works on paper sometimes does not translate as well in practice, and critics have raised concerns that the water supply needed for the project will not be as readily available as proponents believe. An estimated five billion cubic metres of water per year will be needed for the irrigation of roughly 500,000 feddans of land along the banks of the new Toshki canal. Various studies have revealed that 3.5 billion of the five billion cubic metres of water needed can be made available annually through the rationing of irrigation and drainage water.

Another water saving measure would entail a 50 per cent reduction in the area allocated for rice cultivation, down to 700,000 feddans from the current level of 1.4 million feddans. Such a move would save around 3.5 billion cubic metres of water per year. Similarly, another 1.5 billion cubic metres of water can be saved by improving irrigation techniques. When added together, this means that water shortage would not necessarily be a problem. However, such a move does not come without a potentially high cost, incurred in the form of reducing rice production — a crop considered a staple in Egypt.

Toshki has also come under attack for financial reasons. The project is expected to be completed through a series of six, five-year plans, ending in the year 2025. Its overall cost has been estimated at roughly LE300 billion, with the cost to be divided between the state and the Egyptian and foreign private sectors. Given that the private sector is to shoulder the lion's share of the cost, then there is a pressing need to attract international capital flows, whether in the form of long-term loans with easy credit terms, or grants.

To this end, the stock market could play an important role, making available to investors shares of companies participating in the construction and implementation of this project. Banks can also play a role in supporting the companies investing in the project, and other sources of funding can be obtained by capitalising on the area's rich tourism potential, in the form of Pharaonic, Nubian, Islamic and Christian monuments and sites.

Along these lines, a company was recently formed to reclaim 160,000 feddans along Toshki. The company was allocated land by the government and, as the first private sector enterprise to undertake construction in the area, will offer its shares for public subscription.

Two companies hanging fire

The final call on the fate of two public sector companies will have to wait until parliament reconvenes in the fall, writes **Gamal Essam El-Din**

A number of leftist MPs requested that the People's Assembly, before it went into its summer recess, grant a stay-of-execution of sorts for two public sector companies. The requests presented to the Assembly's Economic Committee involved the Egyptian Construction and Prefabricated Buildings Company (MisrFab) and the Nasr Particle Board and Resins Company (NPBRC). The former is to be liquidated, possibly leaving nearly 1,200 workers jobless, while the NPBRC, according to one leftist MP, is to be sold to "a Jewish Zionist with Italian nationality".

Raising the issue in the committee, Raafat Seif, a Tagammu MP for the Mansoura governorate, requested that the liquidation proceeding for MisrFab be frozen by the Parliament. According to Seif, the company has the potential to undertake different housing projects around Egypt, especially in the New Valley project of Toushki. MisrFab, whose parent company is the Holding Company for Construction, Tourism and Cinema (HCCTC), he said, played a major role in ameliorating the country's housing problem from 1980-1991.

"Throughout this period, MisrFab undertook the construction of hundreds of housing units in the new industrial communities of 10th of Ramadan, El-Obour and Belbeis," recalled Seif. "It also built the Misr Hospital and El-Lido Hotel, as well as a number of administrative buildings and commercial markets." The company was even able to buy a number of assets and real estate in different parts of the new communities. The value of these assets, he added, was in the millions of pounds.

MisrFab's financial problems began to emerge following the promulgation of Public Sector Law 203 of 1992, Seif said. The law sought to restructure state-run industries by offering them greater freedom and decision-making powers with regard to marketing, production and pricing.

"The law created a host of predictable problems, foremost among which was the increased competition with the private sector and the government's refusal to lend the company a helping hand in paying its LE19.33 million debt to banks," stated Seif. "Most of this debt was related to projects commissioned by the government."

These projects, however, proved to be less-than-successful, and the company was forced to borrow from banks as it failed to recoup its investment.

Making a plea before the committee, Seif warned that liquidating the company would badly hurt the livelihood of MisrFab's 1,200 employees and their families.

But according to Mustafa Eid, the board chairman of MisrFab's parent company, HCCTC, "The reason for these losses is largely due to the fact that prefabricated building is no longer a viable way for implementing housing projects in Egypt."

"It has no future anywhere in the world," stated Eid. "Moreover, its construction costs are 140 per cent higher than those for traditional construction techniques."

The parent company's chairman refused to promise the committee that MisrFab would not be liquidated, instead saying that its employees would either receive an early retirement payment or vocational training. Those who were retrained would then have the option of being transferred to another of the three housing companies affiliated to the HCCTC.

It is not only MisrFab's future that seems to hang in the balance until the parliament reconvenes in the fall. That of the Nasr Particle Board and Resins Company was also in limbo.

In an urgent statement submitted to the Economic Committee, Seif stated that NPBRC, which is the sole producer of particle board and resins in Egypt and the Arab world, should not be sold to someone he dubbed "an Italian Zionist" at 20 per cent less than its real value. The company's book value was estimated at LE54 million in 1995, while its real estate assets, on which its five factories stand, are valued at more than LE200 million. The company's sales in Egypt and the Arab world are estimated at LE24 million per year.

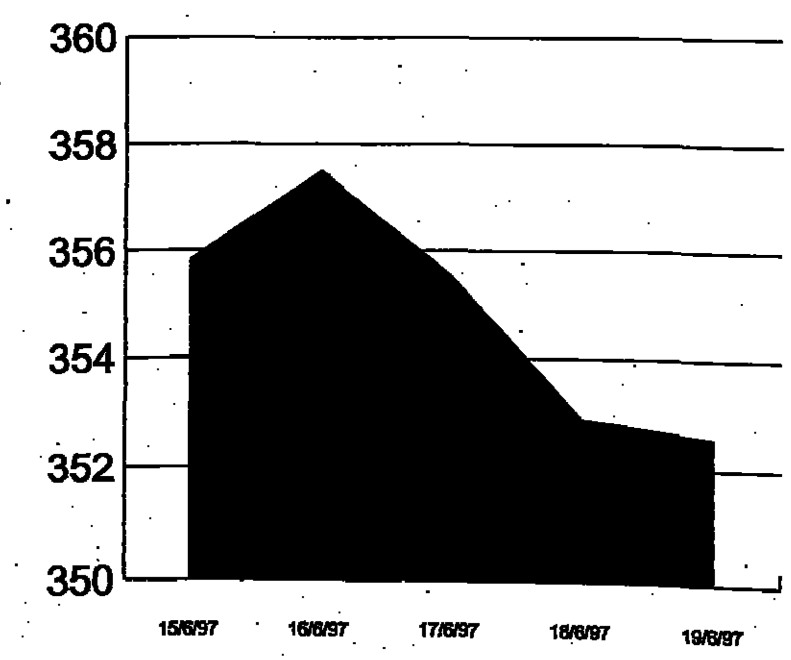
Seif alleged that an unnamed "Italian Zionist" launched plans to buy NPBRC four years ago at less than its value, setting the stage for this purchase by flooding the Egyptian market with huge quantities of imported products similar to those of the Egyptian company. The Tagammu MP also stated that the buyer, launched a media campaign last month in the local papers, claiming that the company had incurred an LE1.5 million loss in a consignment of particle boards exported to an Arab company.

Armed with this information, Seif called upon Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to intervene and protect the company from current efforts by an American consulting office to devalue it, leaving it vulnerable to the Italian.

But Seif, it seemed, would have to wait for a response. The committee adjourned its meetings before discussing his statements, leaving the issue to top its agenda for the next session in the fall.

Market report

Kabo ahead by more than a thread



FOLLOWING a brief recovery period, the General Market Index has once again dropped in points, falling by 4.66 points to close at 352.57 points for the week ending 19 June. The volume of transactions also declined, dropping to LE228 million. The week's poor performance, say market analysts, was due to a lull in purchases as investors awaited new offerings in state-owned enterprises.

While trading in the shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) topped the market in terms of total volume and value of trading, with slightly over LE18 million in stock changing hands, the bank's share value declined by LE1.05 to level off at LE70.9.

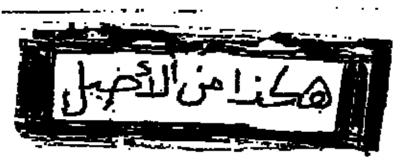
Also on the financial sector, shares of the Faisal Islamic Bank closed at their opening price of LE300, despite an announcement at the start of the trading week that the bank had realised LE309.8 million in profit for fiscal year 1996-97.

Capturing the market's spotlight for the second week in a row was El-Nasr Clothing and Textile Company (Kabo). Two weeks ago, Kabo offered 63 per cent of its shares to the public, bringing private ownership of the company to 93 per cent and making it the first public textile company to be almost completely privatised. After a week of trading activity, its shares increased by LE5 to close at LE108 per share.

Also in the limelight was the General Upper Egypt Contracting Company, whose shares increased in value by 27.57 per cent to close at LE62.52. On the flip side of the coin, shares of the Alexandria Pharmaceutical and Chemical Industries Company registered the greatest decrease in share value, its stock dropping by 17.47 per cent of their opening value to level off at LE90.25.

In all, the shares of 47 companies increased in value, 67 decreased and 38 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

187 Matariya is burning — this was *Al-Ahram*'s front-page headline on 17 April 1907. The Nile Delta fishing town of some 20,000 inhabitants overlooking Manzala Lake was reduced to "piles of ashes and dust," in the words of the newspaper. There was no official word on the cause of the blaze, comparable in magnitude only to one in the Nile Delta city of Mit Ghamr five years earlier and extensive arson in Cairo 45 years later. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the Matariya story on the basis of extensive accounts published by *Al-Ahram*


Illustration: Makram Henein

Fishermen constitute one of the segments of Egyptian society that have not received their due share of attention from researchers. This is surprising given the extensive fishing grounds along the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts, not to mention the inland lakes in the Delta and the Sinai, the Bitter Lakes along the Suez Canal, as well as Lake Qarun in the Fayoum.

Perhaps one reason this class has been overlooked is that the Egyptian population has traditionally been concentrated along the banks of the Nile. This, and other natural and economic factors, have not been conducive to the growth of fishing as a primary occupation among the Egyptian people.

Only rarely have Egyptians concerned themselves with fishing communities. One of these few occasions occurred in the first decade of this century when the city of Matariya along the banks of Manzala Lake burned down. Suddenly this city of approximately 20,000 inhabitants, most of whom were fishermen, captured the attention of Egyptian society at large.

"Extensive damage results from the burning of Matariya" reads the headline of *Al-Ahram*'s 17 April 1907 edition. *Al-Ahram*'s agent in Mansoura reports, "The Matariya fire has decimated the city, destroying all the government buildings and the archives therein. Officials here say that the flames have caused the death of numerous inhabitants. The office of the district directorate has sent 3,000 kilogrammes of bread, emergency supplies of water and tents to house the victims. It has also requested the Ministry of Interior to send a further 3,000 kilograms of biscuits."

The newspaper's correspondent in Matariya adds further first-hand details to the tragic picture: "In my last dispatch I described the enormous fire that consumed the city of Matariya, leaving less than a quarter of the city intact. Yet now, at 10am on 16 April, I see that this has been reduced to a tenth. This too is in peril as the fire is still raging in all quarters of the city and so far none of the government's fire fighting forces and fire extinguishers have been able to subdue the blaze which seems powered by a vengeful angel. In short, this catastrophe has afflicted all inhabitants of this city indiscriminately."

And from nearby Manzala, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent reports, "Fire has engulfed the city of Matariya from all sides. So forceful is the blaze that it defies all attempts to subdue it. The deputy director of the district directorate and the precinct police chief have arrived in a special train in which they brought portable fire hydrants. Yet even this additional machinery proved futile. The director of Daqahliya arrived shortly afterwards on another train and the forces and machinery he contributed also failed to quell the flames. The fire is still raging. It has already claimed untold numbers of victims and wreaked enormous damage and the cause is as yet unknown."

Al-Ahram's agent in Mansoura traveled to Matariya and on 18 June he gives the following first hand account: "I arrived, but I found no trace of the city. What I found were piles of ashes and dust. In this desolate landscape, the poor have taken the shawls of their women to use as tents and to provide some cover for their children. Not content with consuming the city, the blaze also spread to the shores of the lake where it consumed five docks and the boats anchored there. It also destroyed numerous railway cars and the freight they contained."

To acquaint its readers with the scene of the disaster, *Al-Ahram* describes Matariya as "a city of 20,000 on the banks of Manzala Lake. It contains numerous fish stores that depend for their livelihood upon the lake. The city formed a peninsula in the lake, but a portion of the lake was filled in to create a landbridge to Daqahliya and a railway line was constructed to connect the city of Mansoura." As though to confirm the intimate relationship between the inhabitants and their environment, the newspaper added that as the city grew, its inhabitants began to extend the city into the lake by creating landfills from shells which they transported from neighbouring islands. The image reminds us of the Dutch who claimed much of their land from the sea, giving rise to the adage, "God created the world, but the Dutch created Holland."

In the wake of the fire, a nationwide campaign was launched to send relief to the inhabitants of Matariya. As diverse segments of the Egyptian population lent their assistance, coverage of this activity brought society at large closer in touch with life in a rural fishing community.

On 20 April 1907, *Al-Ahram* appealed to its readers to come to the aid of over 15,000 people who found themselves without clothes, shelter, food and drink. "We appeal to the sympathies of charitable and pious people to come to their aid and we hope that the prominent citizens of this nation, indeed the entire nation, will extend a helping hand. For this purpose, we have inaugurated, as of today, a column in both *Al-Ahram* and *Les Pyramides* in which we will list the names of those who have contributed." For its part, the newspaper donated 500 piastres.

The lists comprised broad segments of the Egyptian public for whom it was probably the first time to hear of that ill-fated fishing city. Prominent among the contributors were charity associations such as the Islamic Charity Society and Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa (Solid Bond) Society which solicited donations from their respective members.

The Directorate of Daqahliya also inaugurated a charity campaign for the victims whose city belonged to that province. It is interesting to note that the largest donations in Daqahliya were given by the wealthy merchant class.

Frequent contributors also included members of the liberal professions, for the most part lawyers. Donations ranged between 200 and 400 piastres.

Mit Ghamr, *Al-Ahram* observed, was the district in the Daqahliya Directorate to raise the highest collection of donations. Undoubtedly, the memory of the destructive fire in Mit Ghamr that occurred in May 1902, five years before the fire of Matariya, was still fresh in the minds of this city's inhabitants. "The people of Mit Ghamr, who had tasted the bitterness of the fate of their brothers in Matariya, were the first to hasten to the aid of their fellow man," commented *Al-Ahram*.

In terms of the demographic distribution of fund-raising activity, the highest concentrations of donations were from Cairo and Alexandria and in the major cities of the Delta closest to the scene of the disaster. Few donations came from Upper Egypt. In fact, *Al-Ahram* features only a single list comprising the names of contributors from Tahta, appearing in its 4 May edition. But then, not only are the cities of Upper Egypt far away from the Mediterranean shoreline, they were far less well off than their northern counterparts.

On 28 April palace officials announced that the khedive intended to travel to Alexandria. Contrary to custom, however, they would follow a most circuitous route: up the Damietta branch of the Nile to Mansoura, from Mansoura to Matariya and then to Port Said where he would board the royal yacht bound for Alexandria.

The khedive arrived in Matariya on 8 May. After descending from his private train, "he walked amidst the ruins and the debris, covering all the areas that had been destroyed by the fire. In the course of his walk, he stopped before a mosque that had been gutted by the fire, an action which the people interpreted to mean that His Royal Highness would soon issue a decree to rebuild the mosque. His Royal Highness also donated LE500 to the poor and homeless," *Al-Ahram* wrote.

While the widespread campaigns to solicit donations for the victims of the Matariya fire and the khedive's personal visit displayed a strong sense of solidarity and goodwill, the government's policies proved less effective. Indeed in their frustration, the inhabitants of Matariya were virtually driven to mass protest.

A "General Committee for the Rescue of the Victims of the Fire" was set up in early May. Headed by the chief of the Daqahliya Directorate, the committee appointed an executive committee to travel to Matariya and offer its recommendations. The committee recommended urgent assistance to the neediest victims. These included "401 widows to whom LE2 should be given and 161 heads of household who are unable to provide sustenance and shelter for their families, each of whom should receive LE5." In addition, "large quantities of cloth should be distributed to cloak the bodies of the needy."

The executive committee drew up some recommendations for government policy toward the villagers. First, the government should exempt the villagers from fishing taxes for a period of eight months. Second, it should make loans to merchants and property owners of LE1,000 to be payable without interest over 10 years. Third, the Manzala Steamship Company should offer a loan of LE6,000 to be paid off against the fish marketed through this company. Fourth, relief and financial assistance should first be targeted toward the destitute who are not fishermen, "as fishermen have their sustenance readily available to them." Fifth, "all haste should be made in reconstructing the city." Sixth, "as the inhabitants are as yet incapable of filling in the designated portions of the lake to be sold to them, this process should be temporarily deferred." Seven, the Egyptian Antiquities Authority should "exempt the inhabitants from the taxes it levies on the stones quarried by the inhabitants for the purpose of rebuilding their homes." Finally, "the Ministry of Religious Endowments should reconstruct the mosque that has been destroyed."

In light of these principles, relief operations got under way, but in a manner that greatly upset the villagers. More than LE8,500 was distributed to families that were not engaged in the fishing industry. These families were divided into five categories in accordance with their social standing, and relief was awarded accordingly. Payments ranged from LE50 for the highest ranking families to LE9 for the lowest. LE15,000 was allocated for the families of fishermen, which were also divided into five categories with financial aid ranging from LE30 for the highest ranking to LE5 per family in the lowest ranking category.

"Fishermen have been ranked lower than the rest of the inhabitants in view of the fact that the latter have had their commerce disrupted by the fire and lack the resources to resume the management of their business affairs," commented *Al-Ahram*. "Therefore, these people are more in need of assistance than the fishermen whose activities were not as disastrously affected. Indeed, within only a few days of the fire, the fishermen resumed work as usual. In addition, they suffered fewer losses than the other inhabitants."

The fishermen, however, had another opinion. Reports soon reached the capital that many of the fishermen had gone on strike and, in an attempt to prevent other fishermen from going to work, they physically obstructed them and overturned their boats.

Al-Ahram was dismayed to find that the striking fishermen were supported by some of the other newspapers. It argued that the merchants in Matariya suffered losses amounting to half a million pounds whereas the combined losses of the fishermen did not exceed 50,000 pounds. Thus, while the fishermen suffered approximately a tenth of the losses, they received a third of the amount of aid allocated to the village. It further argued that the fishermen had greater prospects of recouping their losses. "Fishermen find their livelihood immediately at hand in the waters of the lake while others whose homes and businesses burned down have no other means of sustenance at all. They have lost their homes, their shops and whatever money they might have put aside to the ravages of the blaze. The flames however did not consume the lake from which the fishermen could find their sustenance on the very day of the catastrophe while others had no idea where to turn."

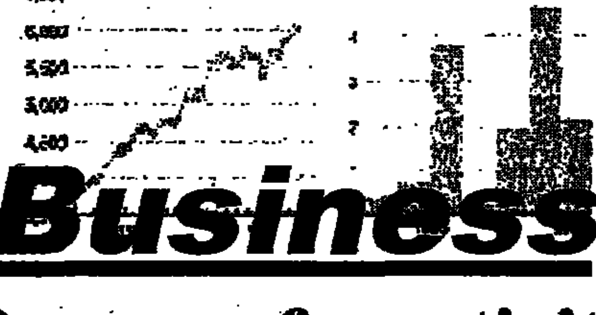
The fishermen also protested a government injunction prohibiting them from fishing with fine-meshed fishing nets as a measure to protect small fish. A delegation of fishermen travelled to Alexandria in order to submit a petition containing their complaints to the khedive. The government did not soften its stance. On the contrary, the chief of the eastern sectors of the coast guard, an Englishman called Snow, posted a proclamation in all quarters of Matariya warning that if the fishermen abandoned their trade, he would advise the government to fill in the lake and convert it to agricultural land, "thereby bringing greater benefit to the general welfare."

Eventually, the fishermen relented. They sent a message to the provincial director notifying him that they were satisfied with the share of assistance provided to them and that they would refrain from further strikes.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business



Proctor and Gamble contributes to hospital

DR MOHAMED Serag El-Din Afifi, head of Ghada Afifi Hospital in 6th of October City, received a cheque for LE40 thousand from Proctor and Gamble International, to complete the hospital's construction and equipping.

Proctor and Gamble had previously contributed two thousand pounds to the project.

Presenting the cheque to Afifi was the Belgian company's manager Peter Shamelt, who expressed his company's interest in humanitarian and social affairs, such as the Ghada Afifi Hospital.

Construction of the hospital is now in its final stage, with 9 to 12 months left to go.

Internet exhibition held

A CONFERENCE and exhibition on Internet technology was held in Cairo last week, organised by Microsoft International — one of the largest software companies in the world — and Hewlett-Packard, a leading company in the field of technological solutions.

Lasting three days at the Cairo International Conference Centre, the exhibition dealt with the commercial advantages that Egyptian companies could benefit from by using the Internet.

The conference also had discussions dealing with the recent technological developments in this field, and how Egyptian companies could maximise their competitive edge through the use of this technology.

NBE: 99 years of creativity and experience

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt's constant endeavours to develop its services has been a key factor in determining its position as Egypt's leading bank. On 25 June 1997, The National Bank of Egypt (NBE) celebrated its 99th year of operation. NBE was founded in 1898 as an Egyptian joint stock company with a capital of GB£1 million. The Bank's capital currently stands at LE1 billion.

Since its establishment, NBE was empowered with the authorities of issuing bank notes in addition to handling the government's accounts and conducting the activities of commercial banks. In 1961; NBE continued its operation as a commercial bank, besides providing the Central Bank's activities in areas where the latter has no branches.

NBE underlines its prominent role as Egypt's premier financial institution with an effective presence worldwide as well as an extensive network comprising of 324 banking units in Egypt. The Bank's figures reflect a sound efficiency in mobilising and investing savings to cover a wide variety of economic activity. Total assets at the end of December 1996 amounted to LE56 billion, with a growth rate of 10.2 per cent compared to December 1995. Total deposits at this date stood at LE41.2 billion, with a growth rate of 11.3 per cent. In addition, NBE's total loans and investments accounted for LE36.3 billion, with a growth rate of 15.6 per cent.

The Bank's capital and reserves edged up, recording LE2.3 billion, while provisions increased to account for LE5.2 billion, thus maintaining the standard international capital adequacy ratios.

A piecemeal adoption of universal banking

In light of the international trend tilted towards globalising banking operations, NBE has always been eager to adopt the concept of universal banking, operating thus as both commercial and merchant bank and extending traditional as well as non-traditional banking services.

In this respect, NBE has spearheaded the introduction of several non-traditional services, for example, tourist and real estate development, capital venture, brokerage, clearing, rating, corporate management, financial engineering, financial leasing, insurance, in addition to the expansion in consumer credit. NBE has also issued more credit cards and expanded its network of ATMs.

Furthermore, the Bank exerts strenuous efforts to support the Egyptian reform efforts, especially in relation to developing the capital market and accelerating the privatisation programme, given that Egypt is considered one of the promising emerging markets, particularly, after being included in the IFC Index.

NBE has played a pioneering role in privatising joint venture banks. In this vein, the Bank sold part of its equity stake in a number of viable banks such as Commercial International Bank, National Societe General Bank, Credit International d'Egypte, Egyptian Saudi Financial Bank, in addition to selling its equity stake in Societe Arabe Internationale de Banque.

To enhance the efficiency of the Egyptian capital market via state-of-the-art techniques of international markets, NBE offered, in July 1996, 50 per cent of its equity stake (representing 20 per cent of CIB's shares) on the London Stock Exchange in the form of GDRs. The said offering was conducted in cooperation with well-established international banks, ahead of which comes ING Barings, and in the meanwhile Bankers Trust Company acted as the depository.

NBE made the necessary arrangements in coordination with a number of banks to offer part of the equity stake of Suez Cement Co. in the form of GDRs on the London Stock Exchange. In this respect, Solomon Brothers was selected to act as a lead manager as well as international advisor, and NBE as a local advisor.

On the other hand, NBE's financing strategy is geared towards accepting meticulously calculated high risks, such as extending project finance in foreign currency for local customers as an alternative for foreign borrowing. This is in addition to managing syndicated loans.

In line with Egypt's economic transition embodied in adopting market mechanisms and assigning a greater role to the private sector, NBE fostered the participation of businessmen in different projects. In an unprecedented step, the Bank is currently adopting a new breed of businessmen via Outreach. The said system aims at training and upgrading the expertise of businessmen, besides providing them with soft-term loans.

Moreover, the Bank adopts a new concept of financing infrastructure — which constitutes an essential element to attract local and foreign investment — whether through the traditional means or via the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) system. It is worth mentioning that NBE's equity participations, in June 1997, edged up to reach 171 projects, with a total capital of LE28 billion, operating in all economic fields such as the financial sector, industry, foodstuffs, tourism, trade, housing and reconstruction, medical services, and telecommunications.

Furthermore, NBE finances 30 per cent of Egypt's foreign trade. Accordingly, the Bank upgrades the services extended to exporters via trade promotion, buyer credit, hedging against exchange and interest rate fluctuations as well as providing information on importers. Besides, the Bank participated in establishing free zones as well as projects erected therein.

NBE also has equity stakes in many export-oriented enterprises whether domestically or abroad, such as the Arab Trade Finance Programme and the African Export and Import Bank.

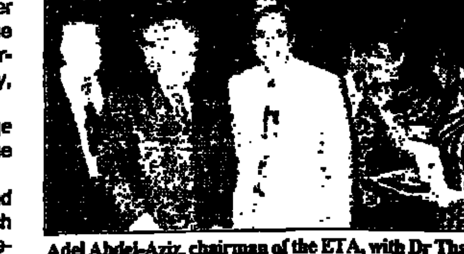
Charlotte: a bright spot on the tourism map

ON BEHALF of Dr Mamdouh El-Beltagui, minister of tourism, Mr Adel Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the Egyptian Tourism Authority (ETA), opened Charlotte Restaurant, which serves as a take-away, coffee shop, patisserie, restaurant and caterer.

Attending the opening festivities were a large number of businessmen and those working in the tourism industry.

Receiving the guests were George Bassili and Dr Tharwat Baselli. The grand opening, which took place last Thursday, was an occasion to remember, with members of the band playing a variety of music dressed in Pharaonic costumes.

Charlotte comprises of two storeys, the first containing a Western-style coffee shop, take-away restaurant, and a pastry shop. The upper storey is a restaurant serving Egyptian food in a Pharaonic setting, creating an atmosphere which is truly unforgettable.


Adel Abdel-Aziz, chairman of the ETA, with Dr Tharwat Bassili during the grand opening of Charlotte

Can't buy love

Cooler heads, it seems, have prevailed in Congress following a Senate subcommittee's bid to strip Egypt of US aid as punishment for the "dramatic change in [its] approach to peace." Could this change refer to the fact that Egypt, unlike the US, is less keen to kow-tow before Netanyahu and his posse of Jewish lobbyists in Congress?

Of course, key US policy makers such as Senator Mitch McConnell, who brought this "change" to the attention of the Senate, would argue that US efforts with regard to peace are aimed at establishing a just and equitable settlement for all, while safeguarding Israel's strategic national interests. Translated, this means that US Congressional officials are safeguarding their posts in the legislature in the best way they know how — offering to shake Netanyahu's hand with their right and Egypt's with their left.

Unfortunately, such initiatives rarely result in diplomatic accolades. In attempting to win over the Jewish lobby by tenaciously supporting Netanyahu's every move, these same policy makers are undermining the US's credibility as an "honest broker" of peace. In short, they are showing their true colours, biases and all.

The irony of the situation, however, is all too blatant. In seeking to blindly support Netanyahu, certain elements in the US government are doing that which even a large segment of the Israel population has refused. The Israeli premier has, as of late, come under fire repeatedly, narrowly escaping this last vote of no-confidence only by buying votes in much the same way as do his American supporters.

But this time, the writing on the wall may be harder to ignore. And the US, if it is indeed interested in securing both peace and its regional interests, would be well advised to come to terms with a reality it has so far turned a blind eye to — it is Egypt and its Arab allies that have proven their commitment to peace while Israel has proven nothing but its reluctance to secure it.

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The impetus towards integration

Arab economic integration is the dazzling prize that has always seemed out of reach. Now, though, writes Ibrahim Nafie, it is a distinct possibility

Enthusiasm for an Arab common market *has* never been so strong, despite the long-standing recognition of the need for such a market. Perhaps this is a result of the fact that it is only recently that Arab leaders have taken on board the grave implications international and regional challenges pose to Arab economies.

At an international level the momentum towards consolidating large economic groupings such as ASEAN and NAFTA, and the increasing attempts to facilitate coordination between such groups, threatens to marginalise Arab economies.

In the past, regional attempts at generating forms of economic integration have met with numerous obstacles. The drive to create a Middle East economic market, which acquired impetus following the Oslo agreements, is now floundering. Normalisation with Israel has always been a thorny issue. Likud's election victory in Israel, and Israel's *intransigence in the peace process, make prospects* for the forthcoming MENA IV conference in Doha appear particularly bleak.

A second regional alternative, the creation of a free trade zone between the EU and countries south of the Mediterranean, offers little hope for broader Arab economic integration. Although the negotiations for this so-called European-Mediterranean partnership have made some progress, the fact remains that it excludes the majority of Arab countries. Moreover, as Syrian Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam mentioned during my meeting with him last week, it is a trifle odd that Arabs should try to achieve economic integration via Europe.

Aspirations for Arab regional integration predate the European drive towards economic unity. It has, however, only been since the beginning of the eighties that Arabs have made practical steps in the direction of realising such aspirations. Originally it was thought most practical to begin with smaller sub-*regional* entities that would ultimately serve as a conduit towards a broader Arab common market. Thus emerged the Gulf Cooperation Council and the economic union of the Maghreb countries. The latter, though, is now practically defunct while the GCC has not lived up to its earlier promise, let alone realised the hopes of non-member Arab countries.

In the light of these past experiences the *creation of an Arab common market has* gained in urgency. It is therefore heartening that Egypt's concerted efforts over the past few months to promote regional economic integration have met with such a positive response. To date, Egypt has taken three important steps in this direction. First came President Mubarak's recent visit to Morocco to activate the agenda of the Supreme Egyptian-Moroccan Joint Committee, which produced the agreement to double trade between the two countries. It was also decided that this committee would meet at a senior official level at least once a year. The second step was the summit meeting between President Mubarak and President Assad of Syria, in which it was agreed to prepare a working paper delineating the practical foundations necessary to establish an Arab common market. Once prepared, this paper will be circulated among as many Arab countries as possible, beginning with the eight signatory states to the Damascus Declaration. Thirdly, Egypt and *Libya have signed a number of agreements to* double the volume of commerce and investment between the two countries.

Of these three steps, the Egyptian-Syrian initiative is of paramount importance not least because, for the first time, the initiative indicates that Arab economic integration is being addressed at the highest political levels. Of course, from a purely practical point of view, economic integration necessarily tops the political agenda and cannot, consequently, be left *to market mechanisms* alone. It is also true that for such a drive to sustain itself, it must fulfil the interests of all participating countries and operate on sound economic principles.

Yet if the European experience teaches us anything it is that political interests function as the prime mover behind the successful formation of economic groupings. That the EU moved to include Greece, *Spain and Portugal*, and to sustain the financial burden of integrating these poorer countries, serves to illustrate that a purely economic rationale sometimes takes a back seat.

The second reason why the Egyptian-Syrian call for an Arab common market is of such historical significance is that the eight countries called upon to initiate the market combine the most active economies in the Arab world. The GDP of these countries combined represents over half of the total GDP of the Arab world. That these eight countries possess diversified economic structures increases prospects for trade between them. Together they produce over three quarters of Arab exports abroad and, combined, they account for over two-thirds of foreign imports to the Arab world.

If we consider this initiative in conjunction with Egypt's drive to enhance economic cooperation with a number of North African countries, especially Morocco, Libya and Tunisia, along with already existing strong economic links between the GCC countries and Tunisia and Morocco, it is possible to realise how such ties will contribute to vitalising trade exchange throughout the Arab world. Thus, it is highly likely that once the eight Damascus Declaration countries reach agreement on economic integration, inter-Arab economic cooperation will be boosted at all levels.

Ending the step-by-step?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that Clinton's strong statement at the Denver summit on the need to resume the Middle East talks is not necessarily an accurate reflection of US intentions towards the present crisis

Last week, the Council on Foreign Relations, a think-tank based in New York, urged the Clinton administration to abandon the step-by-step approach towards the Middle East peace negotiations and launch a major initiative aimed at a final settlement with a Pal*estinian state, however constrained in* its sovereignty, in exchange for security guarantees for Israel.

The idea of replacing the 'incremental' approach by a final settlement is not new. Netanyahu proposed it to Clinton in his last two visits to Washington. American and Israeli politicians may differ as to what the substance and conditions of the trade-off should be. At the G-8 summit in Denver this week, Clinton took a strong stand, with the other leaders of the industrialised world, in defence of the peace process, calling for its resumption on the basis of the two Oslo Accords, the Madrid principles and the *land-for-peace trade-off, but for the* first time a prestigious American foreign policy group openly embraces Netanyahu's new view on how to deal with the procedural aspects of the peace process.

It can be argued, of course, that incremental confidence-building measures have proved inoperative, and that some fresh thinking on how to overcome the present impasse is needed. But one is also entitled to question whether the meeting of minds between Israeli and American politicians on the need to change the whole course of the peace process is not triggered by considerations going beyond the present impasse, i.e. whether it does not betray a previously established plan whose time has come. Significant in this respect is Netanyahu's oft-repeated statement that the Palestinians must understand that they have to give up their dreams, be realistic and accept whatever they can get.

Looking back on what the peace process has achieved so far, we find *that the contradictions between the* protagonists have not been cancelled but displaced into their respective societies. However, the impact of these contradictions has been different in each society. Although the assassination of Israel's prime minister by a right-wing Zionist extremist attests to deep societal rifts, the Israeli body politic has proved capable of weathering the crisis. The same cannot be said for Arab societies, either when it comes to the contradictions between Arab regimes or to those within each society taken separately. When Netanyahu took over from Peres, the situation was ripe for exploiting ex*acerbated inter-Arab contradictions* with a view to abandoning the step-by-step approach first introduced by Kissinger two decades ago and replacing it with a final settlement package tailored to the requirements of Israel's right-wing government.

In the recent period, information was leaked to the Israeli press on Netanyahu's vision of the final settlement with the Palestinians. At best, no more than 40 per cent of the occupied West Bank would be handed over to the *Palestinian* Authority. No Palestinian territory will border on Arab states, neither on Egypt in the case of Gaza nor on Jordan in the case of the West Bank: an Israeli military presence will be established in between. Roads connecting the settlement areas to Israel will criss-cross the Palestinian entity, thus reducing it to an aggregate of Bantustans and depriving it of any *real* sovereignty. Netanyahu proceeds from the assumption that his strategy of replacing the peace process by a systematic policy of *building settlements, culminating in* the Har Homa settlement in Arab Jerusalem, has proved that he can violate Israel's peace agreements with the Arabs with total impunity, thus laying the ground for the final settlement package.

Worth considering in this regard is where the Clinton administration stands on the issue. Despite President Clinton's statement in Denver, there are signs that the Middle East is losing its previous high priority rating in American global strategy as Washington realises that failure in its declared Middle East aims does not necessarily constitute a threat to its fundamental *interests in the area. Moreover, other* issues have supplanted the Middle East in Washington's priorities, as it faces the challenge of a multi-polar world order advocated by a number of world poles: Europe, the Far East (which is expected to change dramatically with the transfer of Hong Kong to China next week), Russia (which fears encroachments from an expanded NATO and which is moving closer to China), a non-Arab Asian Islamic grouping, etc.

In a global context where GATT and economic globalism have replaced the UN as the main engine of world politics, the Clinton administration is obviously tempted by the idea that, as the only world power capable of policing the new globalist mechanisms, the United States is entitled to call all the shots. At the regional level, Clinton may have been won over by Netanyahu's argument that Arab regimes aspire to become part of the new globalist game, and that Israel is better placed than any *other regional power to help them ful*fill that aspiration. If so, then the question is how the Palestinian problem can be made to disappear as an obstacle in the way of achieving that objective. Whatever the differences between the American and Israeli parties on how best to tackle that specific issue, what seems certain is that this will be at the heart of the negotiations over the coming period.

If such is the case, the outcome of these negotiations will be decided by the balance of power and not by considerations of international legality or by the provisions of previous agreements, whether the Oslo Accords or *the Madrid framework. The logical* conclusion to be drawn here is that the commitment to previous agreements has become an obstacle to the final package, that the step-by-step approach is becoming obsolete, and that the more pressure is brought to bear on the Arab negotiating parties the more easily this final package can be implemented. The next article in this same space will be devoted to illustrating the truth of this contention by revealing some of the pressures that have recently been brought to bear on Egyptian diplomacy in this respect, most notably the congressional subcommittee's threat to cut off the $2.1 billion aid package to Egypt for the first time since the signature of the Camp David Accords in 1978.

Buoyant ideas

By Naguib Mahfouz

The most important development to have occurred in the realm of culture during this century is the advent of television, the Internet and the computer. Culture in the future will be available to people from all over the world. Villagers everywhere will be able to listen to all kinds of music, watch plays and read books from all over the world.

Culture will reach the illiterate as well as the educated person. The problem facing us is that, if we do not improve our ability to filter out the good from the mediocre, we will drown. The sheer quantity of material available on the Internet, for instance, can make us incapable of knowing the difference between junk and valuable information. If we are unable to choose, we will certainly drown.

In my opinion, preparing for culture as it will be experienced in the next century should begin with an education that allows us to form an opinion. The second step is firmly maintaining our heritage so that we do not enter the 21st century stripped of our own culture.

If we can achieve these goals, we can enter an era of true democratic culture armed with independent mentalities and able to choose freely. For this reason, I remain optimistic.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Aid and the chopping block

Al-Gomhuria: "What the Senate sub-committee said about halting US aid to Egypt while continuing it to Israel shows that the US has not learnt the lessons of the past.

A little more than two years ago there was talk in Egyptian *government* and political circles of the possibility of the US cutting off its aid to Egypt. The sub-committee's decision is a mistaken one and the reasons for it laughable because the policy of the carrot and the stick never works with Egypt, a country which has for the past 200 years fought for its independence and the right to formulate its own decisions."
(Kamel Zoheiry, 21 June)

Al-Ahram: "Sooner or later, the US Congress will realise that threatening to cut US aid to Egypt as a form of pressure will not work with a country as pivotal and weighty as Egypt. Egypt's role in the Middle East emanates from its position, history, civilisation as well as its human and natural resources. Those who seek to pressure Egypt into changing its policies will have to strip it first of its geographic and historic status. Egypt has always looked upon US aid as a form of international relations based on equality and subject to change."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 22 June)

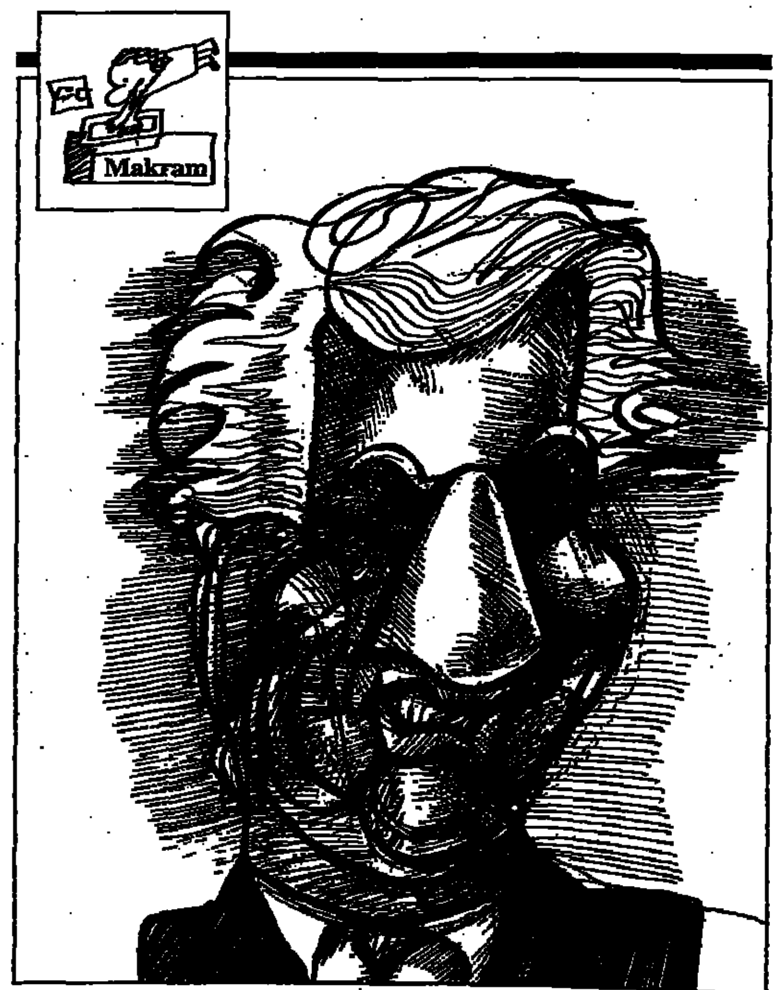
October: "The sole durable truth so far is that US policies in the Middle East are based on backing Israel under all circumstances. Today, it is in the interests of the Arabs to pressure the US *into realising that* its policies are unacceptable. This move should come in deeds rather than words. It should involve measures affecting economic and commercial interests as *well as political alliances... It is unacceptable that the* US should disregard the Arabs to back one country, Israel ."
(Mariam Roubin, 22 June)

Al-Wafd: "Halting US aid to Egypt would be a golden opportunity to shake off the yoke of US-Zionist domination before it strangles us. We are not saying that we should retaliate but we should not waste time breaking off the shackles of dependence which bind us to the US. These shackles only serve to dwarf Egypt's Arab, Islamic and African roles and weaken our links with our brothers and friends who look up to Egypt as a big brother in the struggle against imperialism. The US, backed by the world Zionist movement, has declared its true intentions towards Egypt and the Arabs. *If the US does not cut off its aid today it will do so tomorrow.* So, what are we waiting for? Why do we not take the initiative and proceed to set up an Arab common market which would serve as the nucleus of a future economic global power?"
(Gamal Badawy, 22 June)

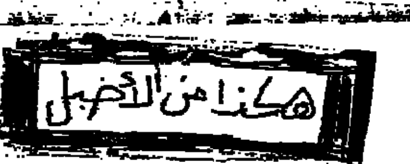
Rose El-Youssef: "The chairman of a US Sen*ate sub-committee has decided to punish Egypt* by denying it US aid allocated to it since 1978... Is this a precursor to a revision of US policy towards Egypt, or merely a personal view of the said chairman? The common interests binding Egypt and the US make it unlikely that the US administration will adopt such views. It is possible that the senator's views are nothing more than a message to the Egyptian government by the American-Israeli Political Action Committee. I believe this could be just a publicity gimmick. My reaction to it would be that each side should look after its own interests. Had US aid to Egypt been in Egypt's interests alone, it would have been halted long ago."
(Mahmoud El-Tohamy, 23 June)

Al-Akhbar: "We must realise that the US is a *country motivated by interests rather than principles.* This is what the Americans themselves admit. And it is well known that the interests of most congressmen lie with the powerful pro-Israeli Jewish lobby and not with Egypt or the Arabs. So, if a situation arises where a choice had to be made between Egypt and Israel, those congressmen would unhesitatingly back Israel, even if Egypt's case was based on rock-solid ground. Had that particular senator wanted to uphold US national interests and ensure that aid is sent to deserving nations, he should have recommended that the US maintain its aid to Egypt and cut off its aid to Israel."
(Said Sonbol, 23 June)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The features of Makram Mohamed Ahmed, newly elected head of the Journalists Syndicate, are Pharaonic in cadence and harmony. In fact, he reminds me of the priests at Tell El-Amarna. His face reflects his ability to take rapid decisions, grasp events quickly and listen intently. Using sharply etched lines, I tried to convey the strength of his character and the intensity of his glare; those who know him have also seen this severity dissolve when he laughs. He wears a silver crown: the strands of hair which frame his face and shake vigorously to the rhythm of his words.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Double talk

It is difficult, at times, to understand the contradictions inherent in US policy with regard to the Middle East. Are these contradictions deliberately employed to attain certain objectives, or the result of conflicting interests at different levels in the US government power structure?

The question must be asked when one notes the contradictions in the statements made by Congress concerning Jerusalem and the denials and rephrasing that were subsequently issued by the administration. The international community, it seems, has to deal with two policies and two US governments — one in the White House and the State Department, the other in the Congressional committee rooms. This apparent contradiction, however, is soon resolved when it comes to Israel, because American sponsorship of the peace process is precisely limited by that which Israel accepts or rejects.

Double talk has set the pattern for US policy in the Middle East, and often reflects this policy admirably. The best example of this is the report published in the American paper *Newsday* concerning the relationship between Martin Indyk, the US ambassador in Tel Aviv, and Edward Abington, the US consul-general in Jerusalem. Each of them sends his reports directly to Washington; the ambassador, however, as a dear friend of Israel, is closer to Mrs Albright, the US secretary of state, while the consul-general is considered to too close to Arafat and the Palestinians.

Indyk stands out as a flagrant example of disregard for traditions that have been established for many generations. He was born in Australia and went to Israel to study Hebrew in 1973. He volunteered for service in the Israeli army, then moved to America and worked for a research department of the Israeli lobby, creating the Institute for Middle East Affairs in Washington, one of the most influential research centres supporting Israel. When Clinton was elected for the first time, he appointed Indyk to the National Security Council for Middle Eastern Affairs, then ambassador to Israel.

In the National Security Council, Indyk played an important role in putting into effect the "dual containment" policy used by the US against Iran and Iraq. Indyk, moreover, is the first Jewish US ambassador to Israel, an appointment which goes against all accepted conventions. He has now been nominated as assistant to the secretary of state for Middle Eastern affairs. If his nomination is approved by the Senate, he will become one of the principal architects of US policy on the Middle East, although this position has traditionally been occupied by a diplomat with considerable experience of the Arab world. At the same time, Abington, who knows the Arab world well, is to be transferred from Jerusalem to some other post, far removed from the affairs of the Middle East.

The real issue confronting the peace process in the Middle East is that those planning policy in Washington speak with two voices. Madeleine Albright, who suddenly discovered her Jewish origins in Czechoslovakia, is a prime example of such dramatic pledges of allegiance. Dennis Ross, the coordinator of the peace efforts, who devotes all his diplomatic efforts to getting the best deal possible for Israel, and Martin Indyk, who is waiting in the wings for his promotion from ambassador in Tel Aviv to the post of assistant to the secretary of state for Middle East affairs, are two more figures in US government circles who make no bones about where their loyalties lie.

This sheds considerable light on the reasons for Albright's reluctance to become involved in forwarding the peace process and rescuing it from the dead end into which it has been driven. It also makes it possible to understand why Egypt and the Palestinians are being encouraged to deal directly with Netanyahu. After all, there is no difference between Washington and Tel Aviv.



Soapbox

Distinguished gentlemen

Few will argue that the US Congress has the right to take decisions that serve American interests. Fewer, however, will be able to understand how the recent resolution passed by the House of Representatives regarding the Middle East can achieve this purpose. The decision to transfer the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem seems intended to torpedo the US-sponsored peace process. It also makes a mockery of a position traditionally held by the US — that Jerusalem will be discussed only during the final status negotiations. The result of the resolution has been to justify right-wing Israeli intransigence.

The distinguished gentlemen of the House subcommittee responsible for allocating aid have also decided to cut Egypt's share drastically. The purpose, again, is to twist arms in a bid to change policies regarding Libya and the peace process. Egypt, however, can live without US aid; this independence, in fact, will allow it to regain much-needed freedom of action. Even in pure economic terms, US economic aid has led to a $2.5 billion trade deficit that Egypt can reduce by turning toward the more competitive world market.

It is time for Egypt to prove that it can survive and even prosper without external aid. Correct economic policies, and more than $19 billion in foreign reserves, are sufficient antidotes to the medicine prescribed by the distinguished gentlemen. Egypt can well afford to tell the distinguished gentlemen in the US Congress to go to hell!!



This week's Soapbox speaker is director of Al-Ahram's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Abdel-Monelm Said

Thirty years after

If the past thirty years have taught us anything, writes **Edward Said**, it is that the Palestinians' yearning for peace and self-fulfilment cannot be suppressed. They have also taught us, however, that a change of consciousness is necessary

One of the most daring books of historical research and argument to emerge in the United States is by Arno Mayer, a Princeton professor, who in 1981 published *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War*. Mayer's argument is that after 1789, and despite a century of revolutions against the monarchy, aristocracy and church, Europe's established, quasi-feudal structure persisted well into the early 20th century with the old elites, the traditional high cultures, and the rituals of authority guarding their pre-eminence against the inroads of industrialisation, the ascendant bourgeoisie, and an irresistible trend towards mass democracy.

If there was ever another case of an old order persisting well past its time, it is to be found in the post-1967 Arab world. To every Arab and Israeli at the time, the June war was one of the great turning-points in contemporary Middle Eastern history. In a matter of hours, the Egyptian and Syrian airforces were destroyed on the ground by a pre-emptive Israeli military strike; vast tracts of land — Sinai, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights — were occupied by the Israeli army; many thousands of Arab soldiers lost their lives, some of them (we have learned in the last two years) massacred as defenceless prisoners of war by Israeli troops; a whole structure of militarist ideology was discredited in the Arab world, though vindicated in Israel; and the Jewish state became the dominant regional power, thanks in part to its alliance with the United States, whereas the Soviet Union, whose weapons and political support had backed the Syrian and Egyptian regimes, was very much the loser until, during the 1973 War, its regional allies somewhat recouped their reputations.

The great irony is that every Arab regime of consequence is still essentially unchanged today, 30 years after the greatest collective defeat in Arab history. True, nearly every government has switched its allegiance to the United States, and formerly belligerent Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation have signed peace agreements with Israel. But the structure of power in the Arab world has remained in place, with the same oligarchies, military cadres, and traditional elites holding precisely the same privileges and making the same general kinds of decisions that they did in 1967. A few weeks ago, King Hussein commemorated the 1967 war's anniversary with a radio broadcast to his people; the war, he said, had been a regrettable mistake, the result of poor planning, poor coordination, ill-considered strategies, and strident propaganda.

The observation he did (or perhaps could) not make was that the Arab situation today was not really any better than it was in 1967. If the airwaves in late May 1967 were filled with the propaganda of Arab victory in war, they have been replaced today with the vociferous, but no less fraudulent chorus of praise for the "peace process," which has yet to receive any widespread popular support or offer any advantages except for Israel. Almost every one of the large and important Arab countries has had elections and has parliaments, but democracy in the true sense of the word is still manifestly absent. The ruler is still in charge of foreign policy, defence, budgetary matters, and overall security. Freedom of expression remains a luxury; controlled newspapers, television and radio continue as the norm for the overwhelming majority of citizens. And when it comes to personal freedoms, the record is no less dismal, no less undeveloped than it was in 1967. Torture, summary arrest, and deplorable prison conditions exist everywhere, as do secret police teams who operate on the basis of an anti-terrorism routinely associated with Islamism, the common scourge of Arab rulers and their Western and Israeli counterparts.

The sheer longevity of the old order is even more astonishing when we go over the turbulence of the past 30 years. For not only did Israel in effect maintain its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (90 per cent of the former and 40 per cent of the latter) despite the peace process, but a major war was fought in 1973, followed by an oil embargo that raised the price of oil to undreamed-of heights, the fruits of which have not significantly increased prosperity in the Arab world; the PLO emerged as a political and, for a time in Jordan, military force to be reckoned with — until the 1970 Black September civil war in Jordan put an end to its presence there and gave it renewed life in Lebanon; the Lebanese civil war began in 1975, consuming the country and an estimated 150,000 lives before the Ta'if agreement settled matters in 1990; Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 (there had been a previous intervention in 1978), expelled the PLO, destroyed and then occupied a part of south Lebanon at a cost of about 20,000 civilian casualties, which included the many hundreds of defenceless Palestinian refugees slaughtered in the Sabra and Shatila camps; Iran's Islamic Revolution brought a new factor into post-1967 politics, first as a supporter of Palestinian resistance, then as a sponsor of local guerrilla groups such as south Lebanon's Hizbollah which, alone among Arab military movements, has fought Israel's occupying forces to a stalemate; the Palestinian Intifada began in 1987 and, for the first time since the conflict between the Palestinian people and Zionism, compelled Israel's leaders to a new acknowledgement of this people's political inevitability.

As much as the turbulence and volatility seemed to portend the most radical change, the striking feature of the political landscape has been the power of the Arab old order, the United States, and Israel to contain or head off any serious challenge. Each successor to a major predecessor has been a diminished version of what came before. Arab nationalism was succeeded by local patriotism that tailored geography to more tightly patrolled, less generous borders. Nowhere was this tendency more desperately and criminally opposed than by Baathist Iraq, for whom its neighbour was the stuff that debased Bismarckian dreams were made of. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and the Gulf War of 1991 constituted the greatest of the post-1967 crises, the one that exposed the terrible rifts between Arabs, dramatised the moral vacancy in so-called Arab "radical" thought, and that finally introduced the US as an actual military presence in the heart of the Arab world. Out of American ascendancy, as well as the tragically misguided policies of Yasser Arafat, who preposterously aligned himself with Saddam Hussein and was thereafter forced by his own cowardice and shortsightedness both to end the Intifada and accept his people's subjugation, came the famous Oslo peace talks and the new agreement between Zionism and the head of the Palestinian national movement.

The iniquities and shortcomings of what began in September 1993 in a blaze of exaggerated publicity on the White House lawn have brought the famous peace to a complete standstill, but not before Israel secured every one of its historical strategic gains and reduced Palestinians to their lowest ebb. Personal income in the West Bank and Gaza has dropped by 50 per cent, while 40 per cent unemployment, widespread poverty and frustration, food shortages, and continued incursions by Israeli military forces against civilians have ground Palestinians further down. Meanwhile about 450,000 refugees in Lebanon remain stateless, given no permission to work or move, and face mass deportation; almost 800,000 refugees in Syria are quarantined in camps without adequate attention to their needs; over a million in Jordan, and several thousand more in various other Arab countries, linger in a limbo without respite.

In the Palestinian autonomy areas (it should be remembered that the Oslo Accords specify autonomy but leave sovereignty, exits and entrances, resources like water and land, as well as over-all security entirely in Israeli hands), a corrupt, cruel and incompetent autocracy under Arafat rules Palestinians for the benefit of a small handful of cronies. There are monopolies on fuel, building materials (including wood and cement), tobacco, and nearly every commodity and consumer item, all of these shamelessly enriching Arafat, his lieutenants and their children. This corruption has become an international scandal. A popularly elected legislative Council has been unable for three years to pass any laws, or make any constitutional inroads on a despot who controls the budget in addition to his 20 security services who torture, kill, imprison critics and ban their books at the whim of Palestine's overweening tyrant. Nor is this all. The Palestinian population of about seven million people is at the mercy of an incompetent man who serves as the implementer of Israeli occupation and dispossession, and who can do nothing more for his people except oppress and deceive them. It is rarely noted that Arafat now represents a minority of his people (the inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank) whereas 60 per cent of all Palestinians reside outside, and must now seek redress for the injustices done them in other ways and with new leaders, new thought, new purpose.

It is an insufficiently remarked irony that Arafat's corrupt peace with Israel forgave the Zionist movement everything that it did to Palestinians, beginning with the destruction of their society and the forced expulsion of 70 per cent of their number from Palestine in 1948. To compound the irony, the PLO essentially ignored the devastation of 30 years of Israeli military occupation, accepted the annexation of Jerusalem and the presence of 140 settlements on expropriated Palestinian land, and more or less said let bygones be bygones. And this while confronting a people which never let the world forget injustices done to them, received huge reparations from Germany for the Holocaust, and today seeks out former Nazis and countries like Switzerland who have been accused of collaborating with fascism. There is a fundamental blindness in the Israeli conscience which the PLO encouraged, instead of forcing responsibility on Zionism for its crimes against an entire people. There can never be peace between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews (and their many diaspora supporters) until public acknowledgement of Israel's dispossession, oppression and robbery of the Palestinian people is recognised as a matter of state policy.

Thanks to the efforts of courageous Israeli and Palestinian revisionist historians, the stark record of what transpired is now easily available. We know that every major Zionist figure since 1897 has dreamt of ridding Palestine of its indigenous Arab inhabitants in order to keep alive the myth of a land without people for a people without land. We also know that the war of 1948 was fought by Zionist forces with an end to driving out as many civilian Palestinians as possible; the late Yitzhak Rabin was personally responsible, as the Haganah commander, for emptying the Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramleh of 60,000 men, women and children.

After 1948, one Israeli leader after another took part in the effort to suppress and defeat every attempt at Palestinian self-determination, usually by attempts at forced exodus (over 300,000 refugees were created in 1967 alone) or, more recently, by closures, curfews, roads built on Palestinian land for settlers, etc.

By the admission of many of its leaders, including the super-hawk Begin, Israel had no real need to fight the 1967 War, except for the desire to add more land to its territory while keeping the Palestinians subdued. An apartheid system today exists on the West Bank where there is no continuity between the Palestinian areas, which are divided from each other by barricades, settlements, by-passing roads, many of them built as part of the peace process. For every one of his exits and entrances to and from Gaza, Yasser Arafat must get Israeli permission, a condition which is more harshly administered for the average Palestinian. East Jerusalem is closed to inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza; as for those Palestinians with official residence permits there, Israel is trying methodically to cancel them, in order to proceed with its Judaisation of the city.

Given all this, it is little short of amazing that the Palestinian leadership persists in its illusion that negotiations with Israel on the basis of the Oslo Accords can deliver land for peace. They cannot, and they were never intended to. The Labour Party never made any secret of this, and certainly Binyamin Netanyahu's extremist government has made its intentions very clear to colonise and steal more Palestinian land in the name of a fraudulent right to settle anywhere in "the land of Israel". There seems to be little intention on the part of the Clinton Administration to do anything more than support Israel "unconditionally," as Vice-President Al Gore put it recently.

It is therefore evident that on both sides the inclination towards a real peace with justice and equality is lacking. Israelis feel that, after 30 years of military supremacy, they can do what they want in either peace or war; Palestinians refuse to reconcile themselves to a state of permanent subjugation despite their leaders' weakness. So long as the fundamental reality is denied or avoided — that Israel exists as a Jewish state by virtue of its having supplanted the rights of all Palestinians with a "superior" Jewish right — there can be neither reconciliation nor true coexistence.

If the past 30 years have taught one lesson, it is that a yearning for peace and self-fulfillment amongst Palestinians cannot be abrogated or totally suppressed, no matter how militarily and politically powerful Israel is. What is now needed is a change of consciousness: Israelis must realise that their future depends on how they face up to and deal courageously with their collective history of responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy. And Palestinians, as well as other Arabs, must discover that the struggle for Palestinian rights is indivisible from the need to create a real civil and democratic society, to invest massively in innovative education, and to explore modes of secular community now unavailable in the "returns" either to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam which are characteristic of contemporary religious fundamentalism.

To The Editor

Not our saunas

Sir- In your article "New species for Qarun" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12-18 June), I was incorrectly cited as saying that "sauna facilities and artificial pools" are being built by the Italian project in the Wadi El-Rayyan protected area. In fact, the said project aims to: develop a management plan for the sustainable use and protection of the area; preserve and protect biotic communities and endangered species; provide the infrastructure necessary for that purpose; and train a team of park rangers.

Alice Perlini
Coordinator,
Italian Programme
for the Environment
in Egypt

The article in question does not attribute the construction of such facilities to the Italian environmental programme in Egypt. We apologise, however, if your statements were unintentionally misconstrued. The article as a whole aimed to portray the positive efforts exerted by the Italian project and the Egyptian government in the Qarun area.
The editor

Turn down the volume

Sir- In *Al-Ahram Weekly* (5-11 June) Sherine Nasr and Mahmoud Bakr focused on pollution, especially in Helwan, but they did not write about sound pollution, which is a problem everywhere in Egypt now.

We all are exposed to such pollution wherever we go. Just get into a taxi and you will be deafened by the volume of the music.

Scientists say that people regularly exposed to levels over 80 decibels are running serious risks to their health. Isn't it time that we issue a law to diminish the volume of sound in our streets, cafés, and even government offices, similar to that of 1994?

Atef Abdel-Gawad Ali
Fayoum

UN atrocities

Sir- I was shocked by the news disclosed recently about the brutal acts of torture and rape committed by soldiers belonging to the Italian contingent that was part of the UN peace-keeping force in Somalia in 1993.

Regardless of the fact that this scandal has caused a commotion throughout Italy, some sort of investigation has to be conducted by the UN itself. Turning a deaf ear to such crimes will only harm UN credibility and tarnish its honour.

This brings to mind what happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina a few years ago when some UN officials engaged in black market activities and other criminal acts in a place where they were supposed to maintain peace and relieve the sufferings of the people.

The question now is: how is the Italian government going to compensate the poor Somali civilians for the atrocities committed by its soldiers? Or would it rather make an official apology and close the door to any further action?

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

In praise of EgyptAir

Sir- I recently had the great pleasure, and, indeed, the privilege of visiting your wonderful country. The holiday was everything I had ever dreamed about and I realised a lot of my ambitious — such as going into the interior of the Great Pyramid at Giza and visiting the Valley of the Kings.

The treasures of Egypt are too numerous to mention individually but I would like to say that I consider EgyptAir to be a modern treasure of Egypt.

Having flown on most of the major Airlines I feel I can state quite categorically that EgyptAir beats the lot.

The efficiency, friendliness, cleanliness, Pilot communication — I could go on and on — is Superb.

One day I hope to return to Egypt and it will be with EgyptAir.

Yaween Ann Maddrell
Horsforth
Leeds
UK





GATES OF VICTORY: The Egyptian gates to the stadium at the Mediterranean Games in Bari, Italy (13-25 June) were commissioned from Alexandrian artist Esmat Dawestashi by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture. Describing his concept for the gate, Dawestashi explains that he was keen to work into his design "a pyramid and four champions — representing the three continents Africa, Asia and Europe as well as the Mediterranean islands — carrying the symbols of victory, with elements drawn from Egyptian folklore." There are in all 21 gates representing the different Mediterranean countries participating in the games, as well as one designed by an artist from the host city, Bari. In a ceremony held on 4 June and attended by the artists as well as a large public, the mayor of Bari officially inaugurated the gates.

In the heat of the night

'A cool breeze' is how **Nehad Selaiha** describes Walid Aouni's *At the Beginning .. There was Dance* at Al-Gomhouriya Theatre

It was a sweltering night with the temperature soaring to 42 degrees centigrade and upwards. On my study floor were huge piles of exam papers waiting to be corrected; I had spent the whole morning and afternoon trying to wage a war of attrition on these piles and failing dismally. All I could think of was cool beaches, rural retreats and mountain resorts. As the day wore on I became more and more depressed and by eight o'clock I decided to call it a day and seek some relief outdoors. But where could you go on such a sultry night?

The last thing I wanted was to watch people doing strenuous muscular and physical work: the sight of someone pushing a wheelbarrow or a light handcart was enough to send me reeling and make me collapse with fatigue. But there was no choice: it is the off-season, and in this drab, lustreless period of theatrical drought there is nothing on in Cairo in the way of theatre but a depressingly brash commercial (so-called) musical comedy and Walid Aouni's selection of dances from his company's repertoire. There were other extra-theatrical options of course and my daughter reeled off a list of attractive suggestions, but they fell on deaf ears. She finally dismissed me as a hopelessly dogged and blinkered theatre-addict but agreed to dump me at Al-Gomhouriya Theatre.

The roads were absurdly impassable and we were stranded on the 6th of October Bridge for nearly half an hour. Inhaling all that delicious car exhaust and feeling progressively dizzier and more benumbed, it occurred to me that perhaps I should not blame my students for writing in the fragmentary, decentred style they do; I momentarily became convinced it was the effect of Cairo's pollution, not of their exposure to post-modernist art and writing. 'This pollution', I said to myself, remembering Lear, 'will make fools of us all, and, perhaps, postmodernists, even though very few have heard of the term or know what it means.'

In the foyer of Al-Gomhouriya the heat was suffocating; I took refuge in the cool auditorium foregoing the pleasure of smoking one last cigarette before the show. It was scantily occupied and most of the occupants were either foreigners (predominantly French and American) or young Egyptian theatre professionals and amateurs. All the other Egyptian young people who love and usually flock to Aouni's shows were cooped up at home, preparing for tomorrow's exams. The idea depressed me; the performance was intended as a celebration of the fifth anniversary of the company's foundation — a kind of birthday party; why choose such a difficult, 'dead' time for a celebration when you know that most of the guests cannot make it?

But the performance soon dispelled all my fatigue, depression and unreasonable sense of guilt. When the curtains parted to reveal a bare stage, completely stripped even of the back partition which hides the back-stage and wings, I experienced a sudden and exhilarating sense of openness and liberation. It was like stripping off your clothes to plunge into the sea or rolling up the carpets at the beginning of summer to enjoy the cool tiles or wooden floor-boards. At the back we could see the cool inside of the building, its inner walls, and the long staircase leading up to the dressing rooms and various working and administrative areas. At the top of the staircase, Aouni appeared, casually dressed, and started coming down, his head turned towards the audience, in step with the music. The dancers followed, in shorts, slacks, sweat suits or workaday clothes, and once down took their places at the barre, at the extreme back edge of the stage, and started warming up. After a very short solo dance, which seemed like a demonstration by a dance-instructor to his pupils, Aouni withdrew and the dancers advanced to occupy the stage and perform the 'Dance of the Beginning' from *The Fall of Icarus* (1993).

In the absence of costumes, sets and make-up, the effect of this opening scene was to superimpose the image of a rehearsal on the performance proper, foreground what takes place behind the scenes in the prenatal period of any performance, and create a meta-theatrical framework within which the miscellaneous dances are deployed. In the presence of this frame, the performance was no longer merely a selection of dances from previous productions, but became a dramatic, representational piece about theatre and performers, dance and dancers.

The relationships of the dancers to Aouni (who occupies the centre of the opening and closing scenes), and to each other provided a kind of dramatic thread on which the various dances (25 in all) were strung. It showed through in the facial expressions of the dancers, their gestural exchanges, their choice of partners, their poses and attitudes at the barre as they watched others perform, and their reactions to the solo numbers. One became dimly aware of emotional undercurrents and hidden tensions, and also of individual character traits and temperaments. The atmosphere was competitive, but in a light-hearted vein, with many humourous touches. In this quasi-dramatic context, it did not matter if you did not know which production each dance came from; the dances had detached themselves from their original sources to form a pastiche intended to showcase the art of dance and the hard work it entails. This reminded me of the American performer Karen Finley who once said that she strives in her performances to impress upon the viewer the fact that performance is really a very hard thing to do.

In *At the Beginning*, Walid Aouni is doing something similar, sharing with us his experience with his group over five long years of hard, back-breaking work, of joy and frustration, and proudly parading his achievement before us without any theatrical riggings or garniture. And the dancers did him justice: the night I was there they performed with great skill and zest and admirable control. It was an extremely refreshing performance, like a cool breeze and ended on a highly comical note when Aouni appeared on stage after the last dance, as if to take his bows, then suddenly assumed the role of the hard, critical, impossible-to-please dance-master and was eventually chased around and off stage by his pupils. All too soon, we, the audience, suffered a similar fate and were shooed out by the ushers to face the heat once more.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaíso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

From The Darkroom (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 June.
The fifth annual photographic exhibition by the Journalism and Mass Communication darkroom workshop.

Farahat Zaki (Pastels)
Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 26 June.

Second Triennale of Graphic Arts
Zamalek Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek Tel 340 8211 and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House grounds. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 28 June.

Ghada Amer (Drawings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St. Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 29 June.

Mohamed Rizq (Sculpture)
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily 10am-3pm & 7.30-10.30pm. Until the end of the month.
Hammered copper and iron works.

Claire Zahnd
Mubarak Public Library premises, 4 El-Tahawia St. off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11am-7pm. Until 4 July.
Books, etchings, lithographs and calligraphic works under the title Singular-Plural.

Collective Exhibition
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St. Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 5 July.
Hassan Abdel-Fattah, Omar Abdel-Zaher, Fathy Afify, Hassan El-Sharq, Emad Ibrahim, Ahmed Selim and Mohamed Orabby.

Adel Thabet (Oils & Pastels)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St. corner of Mohamed Mahmoud St, Borg El-Attebba', Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc ri, 12pm-10pm. Until 17 July.
Forty-five works on display under the title "From Cairo to the Beaches".

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. 2-31 July.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

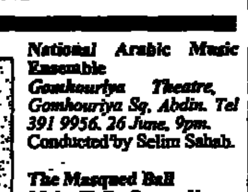
Ma Saison Préférée
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 26 June, 7pm.
Directed by André Téchiné (1992) with Catherine Deneuve and Daniel Auteuil.

Deluge
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162. 26 June, 4.30pm.
With Amitab Bachchan.

Indian Film Festival
The latest Indian films, including films for children, will be screened at the Heliopolis Cultural Palace. Until 30 June. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Romeo and Juliet
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.
Quite an impressive adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting, replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.



Claire Zahnd

The English Patient
El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Ralph Fiennes, William Dafoe and Juliette Binoche in the 9 Oscar awards-winning hit.

The Devil's Own
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Brad Pitt and Harrison Ford.

Sleepers
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & Thur-Sat, midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt and Kevin Bacon.

The Juror
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Demi Moore.

Return of the Jedi
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
A comic adaptation, this time.

Jack
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robin Williams.

Heaven's Prisoners
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Alec Baldwin and Mary Stewart Masterson.

Rob Roy
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Surf Ninjas
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

Eish El-Gharab (Mushroom)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Youssra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

Emra'a Wa Khamsat Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Fifi Abdou, of course.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 26 June, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

The Masqued Ball
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 27 & 29 June, 9pm.
Performed by the Cairo Opera Company and Orchestra, directed by Ivan Filev.

Orfeo Music and Dance Troupe
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 29 & 30 June, 9pm.
The Spanish troupe performs musical sketches from the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Musical Youth Company
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 2 July, 9pm.

Centre for Developing Talents
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 30 June, 9pm.

THEATRE

Le'b 'Eyal (Children's Play)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9.30pm.
With Mona Zaki, Khaled El-Nabawi and Rania Farid Shawqi.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm, Mon 8pm
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Wed & Thu 10pm, Fri 8pm
With Mohamed Sobhy.

LECTURES

Questions of Translation
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 29 June, 7pm.
Lecture by Joseph Dichy, professor of linguistics at the Lumière-Lyon II University.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Music

Missing steps and stops

David Blake finds what costs the most

Cairo Opera Dance Theatre; At the Beginning... There was Dance; Walid Aouni, choreographer; Al-Gomhouriya Theatre, 16 June

The opera stage looks like the XVIeme section of the old Paris metro before it was beautified. Metal stairways like surrealist prisons, black painted; lead from on high to stage front. Any Beauty on the loose could meet any Beast here at any time o'clock.

Down the winding stairway comes a man closely followed by a group of young: nine boys and two girls. When the man reaches the last step he springs off and begins to dance. Light foot, arms stretching out sideways stiffly, he dances. It is Walid Aouni himself. When the young surround him and begin to join in the dance he disappears. He is gone — and so the show *There was Dance* begins. No time lost on introductions, no polite formulas offered. Just dance. Everything, particularly the dancers, hurries. Dance theatre is always in a hurry. It might learn the value of "stop a moment, we must take a look", but we lunge on.

Dance theatre, because it is in such a hurry, has aged rapidly. It is already out of date, unable to cope. Everything is out of date: the dance classics, the music, the visuals, Beethoven and Stravinsky, Petipa and Béjart — all are out of date. The only one who knows how to arrange dance for today is Mark Morris. He faces the greatest revolution in all the arts since the Renaissance. He leaves the rest of Dance theatre wading around, waist deep in old newspapers like poor, old, out of date Callas, and waving its arms about stiffly. It hits nobody now. It has ended in TV as ads for crisps.

The viewers of Dance theatre need a change. Dance needs somebody to lift it up. Walid Aouni could do this for Egypt. For the Cairo Opera over the last few years he has done a series of dance routines. In *There was Dance*, he gave us highlights of his 1993-1997 repertoire.

And what about these highlights? *Agatha*, which turned out to be the least popular of his productions, was the best of all: it has wit, black humour and strange evocative steps, and moves straight from the houses of derangement which pepped up the early arthriticism of Dance theatre. Other productions by Aouni followed: *Icarus*: faulty but brave; *Elephants* quite wonderful, bleak, beautiful and dealing with the present. One of these days someone will find that priceless missing step, the lack of which is the death of the choreographer. *Elephants* passed the test perfectly. *Shady Abdel-Salam* did not. *Last Interview*, a dance biography of Tahia Halim, had great moments: the White Cat episode, with its boon of silence, is bewitching. This one moment lifted *Last Interview* up to the heights.

So why not Aouni to lift up Dance theatre? Perhaps he has travelled too far too fast. Hopefully, *There was Dance* is meant to clear the slate before entering another phase. This new mosaic piece has choice, small things, broken bits of the puzzle of ideas which beset the choreographer.

All Dance theatre people mean well, but they are haunted by the classics. That sleeping princess had better not wake up or they may all be on the bread line. Someone besides Mark Morris will one day find the priceless step, the missing one that counts the most.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies IX; Boris Perrenoud, conductor; Medhat Abdel-Salam, violin soloist; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall; 21 June

When the overture to the opera *Euryanthe* was written it put Weber in the forefront of 19th century romanticism. And with *Oberon* he took music a step forward and then he died, leaving the step for Wagner to pick up. Early Wagner — as far as *Lohengrin* and even beyond, as far as *Tristan* — is in this overture.

Weber had an ally in Boris Perrenoud's conducting. Born in 1966, Perrenoud is young for such a magisterial display of orchestral management. He is one to watch. He has found music's missing stops. His confidence and sureness of approach is stirring. This is me, this is it, take it or leave it. And all done with good manners for there is no tough hitching of the belt for Perrenoud. His touch is exact and pointed; the way of the step is through the music and not through him. He hardly moves: straight up and down, vertical, except for an occasional lunge. Such crispness and startling immediacy for fortissimos out of nothing — how does he do it? Barely a hand movement, no waving of arms. The feet are those of an army official at ease. There is nothing chill about him.

The Tchaikovsky *Violin concerto* found brothers in union. The very fine soloist Medhat Abdel-Salam relished the Perrenoud approach: ready with the climaxes, straight into the wonderful, spontaneous tunes which gurgle effortlessly out of the three movements. Player and orchestra gave Tchaikovsky a new slant. It was like an opera performance, all song. The songs of Tchaikovsky are the songs of hope, not fulfillment. Hope lasts, fulfillment tarnishes. The players brought freshness to what is so often passed off with stale showmanship.

The last item, the Mendelssohn *Symphony 4*, was the brightest light of the night. The celebrated Right to Strike Twelve Midnight to Go went off like a pistol crack. From then on Perrenoud did what he does best: doing the least to achieve the most.

The first movement was green and water sparkled; the second, full of elegant twisty rubato, but never pretty or coy. Mendelssohn remained the aristocrat though without the usual show of party manners. Through the symphony, time and again, there was a jolt of recognition. Is classical music out of date? Mendelssohn, of all people, is not — if there is control.

There are plenty of fairies at the bottom of the garden of the *4th symphony*. Perrenoud shot the lot — carnage without mercy. Instead, we had gnomes from the international money markets. But what spooks.

Around the galleries



Hoda Mourad

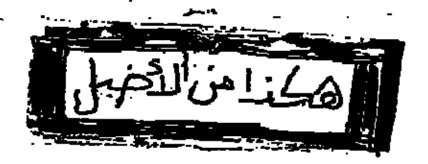
BATIKS by **Abdel-Nasser Shiha** are on show in the **Cecil Hotel**, Alexandria. These are inspired by folkloric art and have rural Egyptian landscapes as their subject.

Landscapes also constitute the subject of paintings by **Hoda Mourad** on exhibit at **the Opera Gallery**. The brushstroke is controlled, the palette, restrained and the compositions uncluttered.

Also at the **Opera Gallery** are hammered copper and iron sculptures by **Mohamed Rizq**. These are interestingly textured and reveal a careful approach to form.

The Centre for International Cultural Cooperation hosts oil and pastel portraits by **Farahat Zaki**. Though sparse in detail, they effectively capture the psychology of their subjects.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri



In praise of honorifics: **Samia Mehrez** examines the implications of the publishing history of *Sharaf*, Sonallah Ibrahim's most recent novel, while **Ibrahim Fathi** reviews a text that ruthlessly exposes the moral black hole that lies at the heart of its titular hero


photo: Randa Shaath

The duplicity of the literary field

The publication of the opening chapters of Sonallah Ibrahim's new novel *Sharaf*, serialised, in *Akhbar Al-Adab* marked a crucial change in Ibrahim's politics and strategies of publication. Those among us who have followed Ibrahim's publishing history know that this development had been unthinkable. It was unthinkable that Ibrahim's work would appear on the pages of a state-run paper, given what he writes and the history of its reception (or lack thereof) by the state apparatus. But with the publication of *Sharaf*, first by *Akhbar Al-Adab* and subsequently by Egypt's reputedly liberal, state-run Dar Al-Hilal, (March 1997) the impossible marriage indeed occurred. It is important to note that Ibrahim was courted by both *Akhbar Al-Adab* and Dar Al-Hilal and that he was initially wary of their commitment. But they both took the risk and delivered.

Further, the first chapters of *Sharaf* were accompanied by a laudatory editorial by Gamal El-Ghitani, the editor-in-chief of *Akhbar Al-Adab* in which Sonallah Ibrahim is constructed as the ideal, autonomous, *disinterested cultural* producer (see *Akhbar Al-Adab*, 5 January 1997). The very title of the editorial ("*Sharaf* Sonallah" / Sonallah's *Sharaf*/Honour) already bespeaks one of the most important attributes of such an ideal cultural producer, with the word *sharaf* (honour) obviously performing a double function in the title.

Indeed, El-Ghitani's representation of Ibrahim's "unparalleled" position within our cultural life provides an exemplary case of the inverted economic praxis of the literary field. It is evident from the editorial that Ibrahim acquires value within the field by adopting values that are in direct opposition to those within the economic world. He seeks no material gain, an ascetic who contents himself with a minimal level of subsistence; he lives in a small apartment in Heliopolis on the sixth floor (and, may I add, with no elevator); he has renounced any form of material occupation or job; he lives in isolation, not seeking the spotlights, connections, etc that may enhance his position. All this for the sake of "continuation" (of creative production) and "dedication to literature."

In the economic world Sonallah Ibrahim is certainly a loser, but within the literary field, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would argue, "he who loses wins." And he is obviously recognised as a winner and is admired, perhaps also envied, for this "unparalleled" position. It is Ibrahim's complete disinterest that brings him so close to the figure of the prophet in Bourdieu's model. As a writer he adopts a similar attitude towards the "worldly" and the "profane" (economic or political profit). And indeed, El-Ghitani's further rendition of Ibrahim, on the pages of *Akhbar Al-Adab*, envelopes him in the garbs of a prophet.

But what happens to the disinterested writer when he decides to become interested? In what does he become interested? And is it all worth his interest? What is the fate that awaits "Sharaf Sonallah," to use El-Ghitani's editorial title?

With the release on the pages of *Akhbar Al-Adab* of the first chapters of *Sharaf* all hell broke loose. Rumours circulated within the literary milieu to the effect that Sonallah Ibrahim had plagiarised from another work. Soon, *Al-'Arabi* published a brief article (20 January 1997) that confirmed the rumours reporting that Ibrahim had copied from *The Cell* by "novelist" Fathi Fadl, owner of a printshop and the third party sentenced to eight years imprisonment in December 1991, along with Alaa Hamid (a virtually unknown writer, author of a novel deemed "blasphemous" by Al-Azhar) and Madbouli (Cairo's most renowned bookstore owner). Fadl had spent 40 days in prison: he recorded his memoirs of that experience in *The Cell*, the alleged "original novel" from which *Sharaf* had been copied.

Despite Sonallah Ibrahim's "stature", he found himself involved in what appeared to be a literary/ethical scandal. Ibrahim's very credibility as a writer suddenly erupted; his laudatory history, as constructed by El-Ghitani, was transformed into a series of accusations which stabbed exactly where expected: all were directed towards his "unparalleled" position within the field as avant-garde, autonomous and disinterested.

In an interview with Sonallah Ibrahim after the publication of *Sharaf*, I probed him on the reasons why he opted for publication with two state-run outfits. Ibrahim basically argued (and here I am paraphrasing him) that even if *Akhbar Al-Adab* and Dar Al-Hilal are state-run they still had within them elements with whom he was willing to collaborate (Gamal El-Ghitani, editor-in-chief of *Akhbar Al-Adab* and Mustafa Nabil, editor-in-chief of the well established Riwayat Al-Hilal, both of whom solicited Ibrahim's manuscript, both fully aware of the potentially explosive nature of his work and both of whom delivered as promised). Another very attractive prospect in Ibrahim's new alliance with *Akhbar Al-Adab* and Dar Al-Hilal was their market, their distribution and their readership when compared to the capacities of private publishing houses with whom he has had a long history.

However, such calculations enforce the rules of the economic world, a world whose values are a direct inverse of the economics of charisma within which Ibrahim's autonomous position had been shaped and consolidated. No longer is this the social miracle of "he who loses wins". Rather this new alliance, these new values come to confirm that within the literary field "he who wins loses." As soon as Ibrahim seeks to win the market, adopting its logic and values, he has to succumb to and is also measured by those same values.

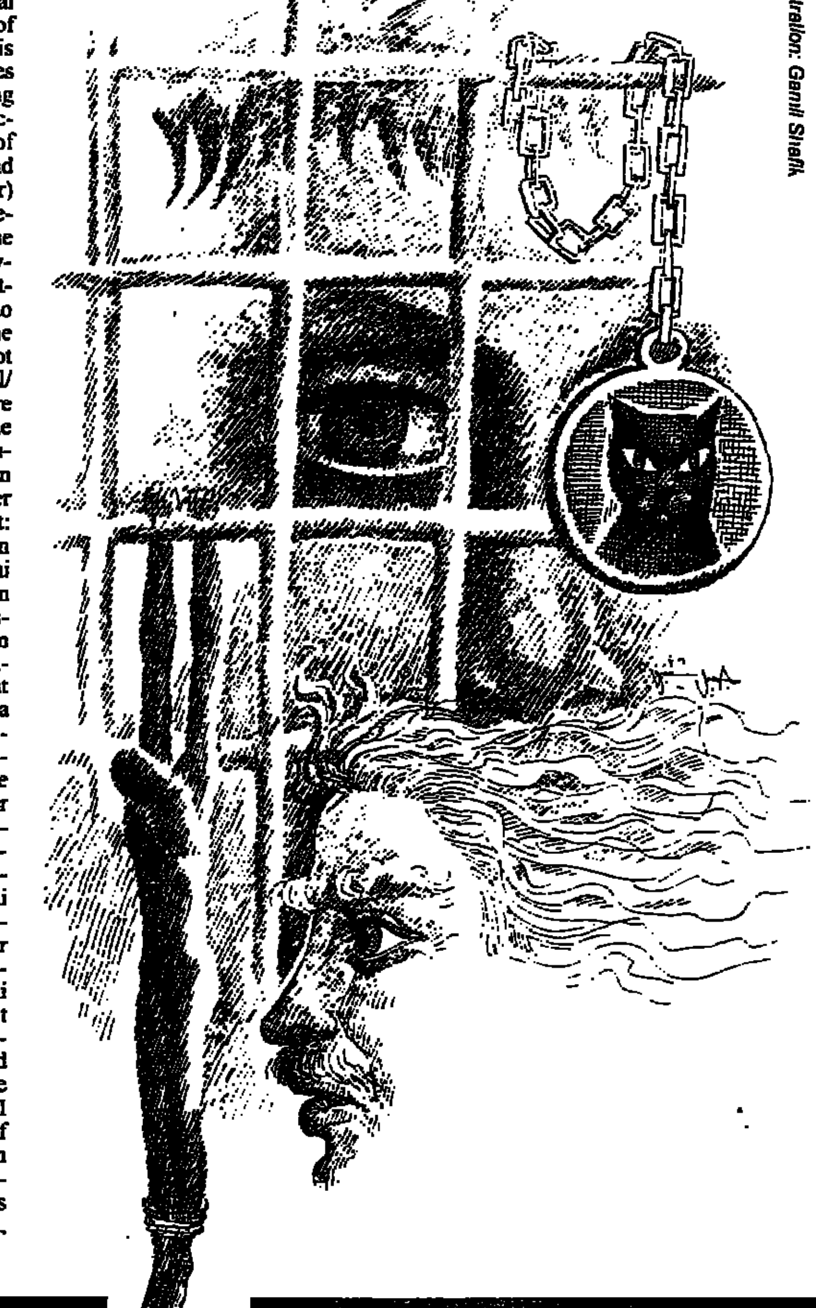
Anyone familiar with Ibrahim's work knows that the document, or the docu-fictional element is an integral part of his work. *Sharaf*, of course, is no exception. In all instances the author has provided a long list of sources and acknowledgements at the end of each work. His publishers (and this is an important factor) have always diligently reproduced these pages. In the case of *Akhbar Al-Adab*, however, the logic of the serial, (itself a commercial logic) into which both Ibrahim and the paper are interlocked, does not take heed of such ethical/literary considerations that are quite alien to the values of the market (especially an unregulated one as is the case in Egypt). For the first time ever Ibrahim commits an oversight: the chapters, which *do* draw on some of the details in Fathi Fadl's description of his prison experience are published without acknowledgements (even though these appear later in Al-Hilal's edition of *Sharaf*). But is it an oversight? Or is it a confirmation of the fact that indeed the praxis of the economic world dominated the entire episode of publication. In either case, the commercial, serial introduction of *Sharaf* in the literary field allowed a quasi-anonymous element (Fathi Fadl) to be identified, in the papers, as a "novelist" on par with no other but Sonallah Ibrahim himself. In short, Fathi Fadl gains symbolic profit at the expense of Ibrahim's accumulated symbolic value and is quoted as having said, at the peak of the entire episode, "I am living the happiest days of my life". Ibrahim's reaction was equally telling: "I discovered that I have no friends [within the field]," he said, over the phone.

The irony in all this remains that the novel itself seems to foretell many of the circumstances that surrounded its publication. The few chapters that had been published begin to tell the story of Sharaf (Ashraf Abdel-Aziz Sulayman), born in 1974 to a middle class family whose existence is deformed by the alarming privatisation policies and the myth of globalisation. Throughout the text Sharaf monologues, dreams and thinks in imported trademarks and designer labels, pitting them against possible local "options" whether they concern food, clothes, accessories or cigarettes. He is a drop-out and like millions of his generation roams the streets of downtown Cairo with empty pockets and on an empty stomach, feeding on the glittering world that Cairo's boutiques, movie theatres, fast food stands and women (local and foreign) may have to offer the hungry eye. The first chapter is set in downtown Cairo with Sharaf's back ironically turned to the statue of Talaat Harb. Sharaf meets John, from Australia, in front of a movie theatre. After Sharaf accepts his invitation to the movie, John takes him home and attempts to rape him. Struggling to live up to his name, or rather in defence of it, Sharaf murders John and ends up in prison. Sharaf's prison world is a mirror image of the outside world divided into haves and have-nots, with bribes and tips to pay for every meal, and every move he, and others, make in jail.

With the complete Dar Al-Hilal edition of *Sharaf* readers continued this journey inside Egyptian prisons. We move from the *'Anbar Miri* (regular/public ward), for the have-nots of the prison world, to the *'Anbar Malaki* (regal/private ward) for affluent prisoners. After a period of long hardship in the regular ward, Sharaf is finally transferred to the private ward when his mother's short, unwelcome but necessary visits, with her modest, local provisions, allow for such a move. In the private ward, Sharaf encounters his counterpoint in the novel: Dr Ramzi Boutros Nassif.

Dr Ramzi is, on all levels, Sharaf's other. He is of a middle class Coptic family, a successful graduate of pharmacology, a witness to the grand national dreams of the fifties and early sixties, a patriot and Nasserist, despite his father's depressive attitude towards that. He is both cultured and progressive, a successful professional and a critical mind. He is a man of the world, travelling in the Middle East, Europe, Latin America and back; a multinational, corporate executive with an Achilles heel: his ambitions for the Third World, his critique of multinationals and his extreme awareness of the politics of globalisation, especially as they impact on Third World economies, societies and general welfare. When he tries to take on the evils of multinationals alone, he is framed by his colleagues in a fabricated bribery case and ends up in jail.

From the start, Dr Ramzi has a grain of the saviour about him: as a student he believed in free medicine for all, as a corporate manager he worked against the ideologies and policies of the multinationals that employed him. Even as a prisoner he incessantly advised fellow prisoners on what to eat and what not to. In his sincere mission to enlighten and save, he writes and directs a subversive puppet show for the prisoners. Ignorant of its contents, the prison authorities allow Dr Ramzi to stage his show in celebration of the Six of October Victory. At the end, the entire event is transformed into a riot. The prison authorities take matters in control, penalise the prisoners and lock up Dr Ramzi in solitary confinement. Dr Ramzi spends the rest of his existence on the pages of the novel yelling proclamations from his solitary confinement to awaken his fellow prisoners and incite them to rebel but to no avail. Ramzi's appeals are met with total disinterest and contempt. *Sharaf* closes with Dr Ramzi alone in his cell, unheeded and unheard as Sharaf stands under the shower, shaving his body hair with an Israeli-made blade, in preparation for a prospective homosexual relationship with another prisoner.


Illustration: Gamil Shafik

Ibrahim's readers will find themselves quite familiar with Dr Ramzi's character. He is a déjà vu, much like the protagonists in *Tilka Al-Raiiha*, *Al-Lajna*, *Najmat Aghustus*, *Bayrut Bayrut* and even *Dhat* (Ibrahim's only female protagonist who locks herself up in her bathroom and cries, sitting on the toilet seat). They are all the self against the world; the self oppressed, disillusioned, defeated, alone, unheard, and crushed. But who is Sharaf, Sharaf who commits the very act that has for long obsessed most of Ibrahim's narratives without ever being confirmed or fulfilled?

In an earlier article on Ibrahim's novel *Dhat* I had argued that the use of both an omniscient narrator and a female protagonist, for the first time ever in Ibrahim's novels, had allowed him to achieve "the ultimate objectification of the self," (see *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*, 1994). In *Sharaf*, again for the first time, Ibrahim uses two first-person narrators: Sharaf (too small for his name) and Ramzi (too big for the world); two selves that see, narrate and occupy the world of the prison quite differently. Can one now ask: is this doubling of the "I" in the text, with such totally antagonistic positions, a sign of the self divided?

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An index of indifferent dreams

Sharaf, Sonallah Ibrahim. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1997

The structure of *Sharaf*, while continuing Sonallah Ibrahim's experiments with fictional modes capable of accommodating his subject matter, is very different from that of Egyptian novels in general. The Egyptian novel, in its most familiar guise, allows events to unfold through the experience of a single character against a political backdrop.

To most readers and some critics, the novel as a genre has long been considered a chronicle of private life. Reality, as presented in the Egyptian novel, was the personal or family life of a character generally drawn from the middle-classes. The political and economic context of the novel would figure only in muted allusions because such elements were considered extraneous to the art of fiction.

Zhat, Ibrahim's novel immediately preceding *Sharaf*, comprised documentary sections composed of newspaper clippings, official statements, and actual events. In *Sharaf* Ibrahim deploys a similar technique to draw attention to the links between the personal and political in human destiny. Indeed, the very first lines of *Sharaf* question that favourite tenet of the traditional novel, the individuality of the fictional character. Here, the narrator informs us that the protagonist, Sharaf, was programmed "by external and internal genes" for what befell him. It is not, however, that the author is working within the perimeters of naturalism when addressing the influence of heredity and the environment. Rather, Ibrahim attempts to reformulate current definitions of the individual.

The main character is driven by hidden forces — revealed later in the novel — which dictate his ideas, disposition, taste and desires.

We first meet Sharaf crossing Talaat Harb Square, named significantly after the celebrated nationalist financier and industrialist. Sharaf turns his back to the statue as he contemplates with fascination the beautiful, imported consumer goods in the shop-windows. His "options" (and the English word is transliterated in the text) for spending the evening are limited: he considers watching a film where a lot of blood is shed, since sex scenes are censored, or smoking a joint with his group of friends. He thinks of the small flat where he lives with his impoverished family, whose standard of living has been eroded by the government's policy of "liberating" prices and freezing salaries. He seeks refuge in the paradise of designer labels he will never be able to afford and car marques he will never drive. He memorises dozens of brand names of foreign refrigerators, air-conditioners and electrical appliances to better furnish his world of day dreams.

He meets, by coincidence, a foreign man at the entrance to a cinema. Sharaf accompanies the foreigner to his luxurious flat (an index of his own day dreams), smokes a joint with him, leans his head on the foreigner's chest and pours out his heart ("I wish you'd take me with you somewhere far"). A messenger from the paradise of imports, the well-built foreign man offers Sharaf an expensive gold chain before pouncing on him to rape him. Attempting to defend his *sharaf* (honour), Sharaf hits the foreigner with a whisky bottle and unintentionally kills him. It is a highly symbolic beginning that underscores the relationship between foreign aid and rape.

The scene shifts to the world of prison, with chapters alternating, in the first section of the novel, between a third person narrative and Sharaf's voice. The underworld of the prison is indeed Kafkaesque. Modern techniques of torture are wielded so that the accused confess whatever is expected, and since torture for its own sake is a modern art practiced for sadistic ends, it continues after the accused has confessed. Sharaf — naked, eyes covered, hands and feet bound, blows and kicks raining on him, electric shocks administered to sensitive parts of his body — has no recourse but to "confess" that he killed the foreigner with pre-meditation, and that his motive was robbery.

The prison world, which occupies the larger portion of the novel, is parallel to the outside world, crystallising the same dominant logic: the huge gap between rich and poor, the subjugation and exploitation of the weak by the powerful. As in the free world, behind bars money can buy anything. For five pounds, the guard leaves the door of the cell open all day long; for 50 pounds, the medical authorities transfer a prisoner to a hospital outside prison; for 100, all manner of forbidden goods — from whisky to hashish — are smuggled in: for several thousand pounds the prisoner can be released on medical grounds or transferred to a mental hospital as a preliminary step towards his final transfer to the world of the sane.

In prison Sharaf meets different types of criminals as well as a number of innocent people imprisoned on false charges. Among his fellow-prisoners are representatives of various political, economic and intellectual trends: members of religious groups of different hues; extreme proponents of the Open Door policy; a supporter of Palestinian freedom fighting, and so on. It is in an ironical tone that the novel observes these types, highlighting the contradictions in their behaviour and words (with the exception of the Palestine supporter who becomes epileptic as a result of the many mock-hangings to which he was subjected by the prison authorities in an attempt to force him to inform).

The second most important character after Sharaf is Dr Ramzi Boutros Nassif, a pharmacologist who has worked in Europe, Latin America and Egypt. When Dr Ramzi opposes some of the company's plans, a fabricated bribery charge is brought against him and he ends up in prison. The second section of the novel brings us both Dr Ramzi's papers as well as a puppet show he writes and directs on the occasion of the celebrations of the October 1973 War. This is a didactic, Brechtian play examining the links between the new world order, the Palestinian situation, the support Israel's role in the Arab region receives, problems of privatisation, and external domination. There is an American puppet, an Israeli puppet, and a puppet in Gulf costume discussing the situation in the Gulf and Western conspiracies in the Gulf War.

In the second section of the novel the documentary elements are very long. This section, however, is not merely a political appendage imposed on the novel. *Sharaf* proposes a possible form for the post-individualist novel where a parallelism exists between, on the one hand, two ways of living one's life — Sharaf's self-centred way and Ramzi's quixotic resistance — and, on the other, the structure of meanings that the novel constructs with the emphasis being put on the discrepancy between the development of the First World and the underdevelopment of the Third.

The documentary section of the novel presents one facet of the human drama at the present historical moment: the narrative takes stock of global economic forces showing how these forces operate to extend their domination over political institutions in the Third World in general and the Arab region and Egypt in particular. Throughout the novel we are confronted with an incessant struggle for domination, integration and the structural re-adjustment of the mind. Documentation in this novel is not aimed at providing a comprehensive politico-economic survey of society. Rather, every item included in the section has been carefully selected to shed light on the human condition in the deeper sense of the word, inter-linking in a revealing way, showing that behind the deceptive surface of the slogans of human rights and interdependence there lies a more sinister reality of whole countries that have been transformed into jails strikingly similar to the one in which Sharaf resides, and where peoples languish, stripped of their *sharaf* — honour.

The last section, the third, is relatively short. Ibrahim continues his depiction of the world of the prison and its inhabitants. Sharaf, whose negativism has led him to work as a mole for the prison administration, spies on Dr Ramzi, accepts the protection of an influential inmate and smuggles drugs. Sharaf, who waged a fight to defend a notion of honour so shrunken that it came to be centred in his backside, ends by hiding drugs in that same orifice.

In the closing lines of the novel, we see Sharaf, after recuperating from an illness, enjoying the joys bestowed upon him by his patron — a clean razor, fresh underwear and hot water. And we find Dr Ramzi declaiming from solitary confinement speeches about the rights of inmates, speeches that fall on deaf ears. The close of *Sharaf* brings nothing to a close, but then neither does it open any new avenues. It throws a host of question marks in the face of the reader.

Reviewed by **Ibrahim Fathi**

Plain Talk

I have just been in Philadelphia for three weeks, which has given me the opportunity to view, at close quarters, the workings of a university city in the heartland of the United States. Before actually visiting Philadelphia was just another American city, founded by Franklin and with a largely Afro-American population.

I came away from Philadelphia with a very interesting picture of the city. Philadelphia, I found, is a city deeply preoccupied, indeed obsessed, with its university, Pennsylvania, which is regarded as one of America's best. The whole life of the city revolves around Penn, as it is called. Indeed, every other building is named after Penn.

Penn's Department of English Studies is one of America's leading English departments. As evidence of the outstanding level of scholarship in the department one can cite the contributions of its professors. *The Trouble with Genius*, by Dr Bob Prelman, a distinguished poet and critic, provides insightful readings of Pound, Joyce, Stein and Zukofsky. In her *Euthorizing Joyce*, Dr Vicki Mahaffey carefully explores the influence of Egypt on Joyce. I was also lucky in my guide around the campus, Lana Yunus, a Ph.D. student whose dissertation comprised a comparative study of William Carlos Williams and a number of Arab poets.

I also had the opportunity of meeting Dr Martin Meyerson, Emeritus President of the university and author of a wonderful book on the history of the institution, *Gladly Teach and Gladly Learn*. Of Penn's many libraries, I was particularly keen on visiting the English and the Arabic ones. I was surprised, and I must say flattered, to find in the English library a list of all the books I have written and edited, including my introduction to the Everyman Edition of Edward Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian*. I even found a summary of my professional background. This goes to show the extent of information the library has. The advances in information technology and the massive amounts of information that can be stored on easily accessed retrieval systems have revolutionised academia and, of course, the institution that lies at its heart, the library. We have not yet come to realise the potential and implications of this revolution, nor are we yet in a position to fully predict its impact on teaching methods that remain rooted in essentially Medieval practices.

In the Arabic section I found almost all the books one finds in a university library in Egypt. Not one of our prominent writers — from Mahfouz to Saadeddin Wabba — was missing. The Department of Arabic Studies is headed by an old friend, Dr Roger Allen, whose Oxford Ph.D. thesis was on Moelhi's *Hadith Issa Ibn Hisham*. Dr Allen is also the author of a number of books on Arabic literature as well as English translations of Arabic short stories.

Indeed, the University of Pennsylvania has played a pioneering role in Arabic studies in the US. While courses on Arabic literature were taught at various universities, Penn was the first university to establish a chair for Arabic studies.

But one should not overlook the important work being done on the environment and geology at Penn. Take, for example, Professor Naff's work. His research papers on the Nile and the problem of water are invaluable.

At the Geology Department I had a very pleasant conversation with Dr Hafez, an Egyptian who is currently a visiting professor at Penn. Dr Hafez, who is working on analysis of the Nubian terrain, enthused about the facilities offered him in the department. I came to realise why our scholars seem always to do so well in non-Egyptian universities, where both the facilities and atmosphere encourage achievement.

Mursi Saad El-Din



Mohamed Ali Street on the day of Khedive Ismail's funeral. The procession wound its way from Abdin Palace to El-Rifa'i Mosque, where the Khedive was buried

Photo courtesy of Maged Farag

Sequins, snakes and seductresses

Mohamed Ali Street, which cuts diagonally across pre-19th century Cairo, was laid out by Khedive Ismail to connect the Citadel with El-Ezbekiya and Abdin Palace. At the turn of the century, during its heyday, it became famous for the entertainers who lived in its vicinity. Now, many of the singers and dancers have moved away, and the monuments are crumbling quietly away. But as Fayza Hassan and photographer Randa Shaath discover, although the street has lost much of its character, it is still struggling to retain its reputation





In his efforts to reform Egypt on the basis of the Western model, Mohamed Ali decided to clear Cairo of dancers and public women, the presence and visibility of whom, he thought, cheapened the image of the capital. In 1834, he issued an edict forbidding dancers to work in Cairo. Violations of the new law were punished with fifty lashes for the first offence and a year of hard labour for repeated offences.

Having been punished, the women were then banned to Upper Egypt, where tourists had to travel for a taste of what had come to symbolise "the Orient" in foreigners' minds.

Ironically, years later, when the ban was finally lifted, the entertainers returned to settle in Cairo, and found convenient accommodation on the street bearing the Pasha's name, which soon became known as El-Awalem (Dancers') Street.

The sound of music

At the beginning of the century, the street was lined with music shops, coffeehouses and agencies which arranged for entertainment at weddings and private parties. The music shops displayed copper instruments for the many brass bands that performed at the time, many of which attracted a cosmopolitan public to El-Ezbekiya Gardens, where concerts were held regularly. The most famous of these bands was *Firqit* Hassaballa (Hassaballa's Troupe — a name which later came to designate any brass band).

Other music shops sold traditional Oriental musical instruments such as the *oud* (lute), the *kamanga* (a kind of viol), the *tabla* (drums) and the *qanun* (dulcimer). Many of these shops are still in business, but the owners say the clients have changed. They are mainly after bargains, says one shopowner.

Learned women and dancing girls

There is still a great deal of controversy attached to the word *alma* which, following E W Lane's definition, means "a learned female" and has been taken by many historians to refer to a woman trained in the arts of poetry, prose, music and singing.

Others believe that the term was used in connection with a woman experienced in worldly matters. Nowadays, an *alma* is simply an experienced performer, essentially a dancer who may or may not sing as well.

"At the beginning of this century, wedding celebrations were still segregated, and for that reason women were prominent in the entertainment market," writes Karen van Nieuwkerk in *A Trade Like Any Other, Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1996). "Women played the lute, drum, tambourine, and *qanun*, a zither-like instrument." The entertainers formed groups which worked regularly under the leadership of an *Usta*, an experienced performer "who taught the trade to family members and new girls."

The members of the troupes lived in the small back streets off Mohamed Ali Street, while the *ustawat* resided in a seperate alley, Haret El-Awalem. "The houses of the *ustawat* were decorated with signs advertising the leading lady. Their offices were downstairs, since no male customer could enter their house. The *usta* or her male assistant (*mutayabati*) received customers in the office and the latter also negotiated in the coffeehouses on the main street," writes van Nieuwkerk. According to her research, it was acceptable for an *Usta* to frequent coffeehouses where she went to learn new numbers or personally meet the customers. Arrangements were made for the troupes to perform at weddings, sometimes staying at the bride's house for several days, singing and dancing during *Leilet El-Galwa* (the night when female visitors are invited to admire the bride's finery), *Leilet El-Henna* (the night when the bride and her friends have their hands and feet decorated with henna) and *Leilet El-Zefaf* (the night of the wedding itself).

The street, which had its heyday during the first decades of the century, still resounds with famous performers' names such as Almaz, Bamba Kashshar and Shafiqa El-Qibtiya, who "lived better than the ladies of the aristocracy". It is said that Shafiqa's carriage was as splendid as the Khedive Tewfik's. She used to drive it at top speed down Mohamed Ali Street, causing numerous accidents. She attracted so much attention, in fact, that the minister of interior dispatched an officer to ask her to display more reserve in her public appearances.

"Only the khedive has the privilege to behave as he pleases," the officer, unable to obtain a promise for more restraint, finally told her. "If the khedive is the only one to sit on his throne," Shafiqa answered the embarassed officer, "you must know that there is only one Shafiqa in this whole country."

Today, there are no more glorious names on the street. The modern successful "*artistes*" (the term is no longer in use; it has been replaced by the word *fannana* (artist), which does not have the same connotations) who rose to fame and are currently working in five-star hotels and/or are hired to perform at the weddings of the elite, command huge fees and have been able to move out of the neighbourhood, to expensive apartments in Zamalek and Mohandessin. There is a basic difference between these dancers and the traditional Mohamed Ali Street *awalem*. The latter never performed in nightclubs, cabarets or a *sala* (a cheap version of the Western nightclub). They were only hired to dance and sing at *mawaled*, weddings and private parties, usually those of the middle class, rarely at celebrations in the houses of pashas. Those who occasionally worked the nightclub circuit did not boast about it, according to Nieuwkerk.

In the late '30s, the secular aspect of the *mawaled* and saints' celebrations had to be restricted, in accordance with a revival of religious conservatism, but they were given a new lease of life after the July 1952 Revolution, and the women of the Mohamed Ali Street families were once more kept busy. During this period "female performers no longer worked with one specific *usta*, but started working with several female and male employers," writes van Nieuwkerk. The *ustawat* were replaced by troupe managers and the word eventually lost its meaning in connection with the trade.

Entertainers, however, still formed a close-knit society and stuck to the street until the '70s, when changes in the way weddings were celebrated — a consequence of social and economic developments — "had profound repercussions on all Mohamed Ali Street performers and employers, especially women."

During the Sadat period, weddings increased in scale and the growing demand for entertainers sent their wages and tips skyrocketing. The system of payment changed and earnings stopped being shared equally. "Entertainers no longer formed separate groups with fixed



Ahmed Abu Shanab, remembering Mohamed Ali Street's glorious days



Hassan Khanoufa, who has made the transition from weddings and *mawaled* to theatre

membership that were headed by specific *ustawat*.

From the 1970s on, the groups were increasingly composed of mere individuals working for the highest bidder. The individualisation is related to the end of the monopoly of the Mohamed Ali Street entertainers," comments van Nieuwkerk.

Entertainment in the '90s

Today, the dancers who still gather or live in Mohamed Ali Street perform mainly at middle class parties and weddings held in the street by those unable to afford a "private" wedding. They do not necessarily live in the vicinity and only come to one of the coffeehouses by arrangement, to meet with the other members of a group before the performance. The profession no longer runs in the family.

Ahmed Abu Shanab, who introduces himself as an expert on the history of the street, says wistfully: "Nowadays, it is hard to tell where the girls are coming from. Some live in Shubra, others have run away from the countryside. You seldom know their families or background. Times have changed." For years, all the dancers who made it big came from Mohamed Ali Street and belonged to families of artists. "Tahiya Carioca, Nagwa Fuad and Naima Akef, for instance," says Abu Shanab. "Naima's family were all artists — her father, her mother, her brothers — and they were all very good, a very respectable family."

Abu Shanab reminisces about the times where the street resounded with the stage names of dancers like Saniya Kahraba ("Electricity") and Naima Samaka ("the Fish"). The latter, the mother of famous dancer Lucy, died recently. "Lucy is also from the street and she has not forgotten it, she comes often; a bit less now that her mother has died — but success has not gone to her head," says Anwar Kamel, the oldest ironer on the street.

Adawiya (a famous popular singer), he says, also worked as an ironer when he first moved in. "When he became famous, he took a room in this hotel," he says, pointing at a rather modern multi-storey building. "I used to iron his tuxedo jacket every night before he left for his performance," he adds proudly. "Shoukoukou (a comic actor of the '50s) used to sit here," he continues, "where this furniture shop is now. It used to be a famous coffeehouse."

Many of the coffeehouses have changed hands, been taken over and transformed into busy little workshops out of which modern and imitation antique tables, chairs, buffets, overstuffed gilded sofas and armchairs spill out onto the footpaths and side alleys.

"This is recent," says Abu Shanab. "Twenty years ago there were no carpenters around; now Damietta has moved to Mohamed Ali Street" (a reference to the furniture trade for which Damietta is famous).

Ahmed Cravata ("the Tie"), an entertainers' agent, whose headquarters are at the Nadi El-Mushir café, also remembers Shoukoukou, who, he says, started out as a *makwagi* (ironer). Cravata explains that now dancers are hired through their husbands or bosses, whose nickname they adopt. For instance, Hala Cravata, his wife, can only be hired through him. He organises the troupes according to the wishes and the financial means of the client. His speciality is street marriages, but he can also provide other entertainers, magicians, comedians, brass bands for *zaffas*, and male and female singers, all of whom work exclusively for him.

Some of the entertainers who still frequent Mohamed Ali Street have become famous in their own right. Hassan Khanoufa, who works with Hassan El-Geretli and El-Warsha theatre troupe, is one of them. Hassan is always ready to regale visitors to his haunt, the Nadi El-Mushir café, with his renditions of the *aragoz* (the Egyptian puppet show), and assorted numbers from his repertoire. He is also keen to praise El-Geretli and the members of El-Warsha troupe. "They are the best," he says enthusiastically.

Ahmed Cravata is particularly impressed with Hassan Khanoufa, who works with a famous director and a "serious" troupe. "Khanoufa is a real artist," he says.

The entertainers' agents are particularly sensitive to the talent — or lack thereof — of the artists they manage. "There are those who just come along for the few pounds they may earn. We know that they need the money so we try to give them easy parts, like at street weddings where they don't really have to play well." On the other hand, they have to be fair to the client, he says, giving him his money's worth.

"But," says Cravata with a grin, "when a connoisseur comes around, we are always prepared to lower our prices and give him a real good show."

Tug of war

Mohamed Ali Street, like so many other streets in Cairo, is the battlefield on which the present is unable to take a firm grip, while the past, eroded on a daily basis, refuses to be quietly buried. Old and new coffeehouses vie for the privilege of having been here first, though not all of them are necessarily connected to the entertainment trade.

One of the cafés, Zahret El-Qaysun (Qaysun's Flower), has long been the haunt of taxi drivers. The present owner inherited it from his father and has made few changes on the premises. He has changed the name, though. "The place used to be called the drivers' coffeehouse, but I think that the new name suits it better, because this is the name of the quarter," he says, explaining that, although he is a government employee, he could never sell his father's shop.

The street and its builders

A major obstacle to Mohamed Ali's plans to modernise Cairo was the irregular design of the capital's narrow lanes, writes Andreé Raymond in *Le Caire* (Fayard, 1993). The first horse-drawn carriages appeared in Cairo in the 1820s, the very first of which was offered by the French to Mohamed Ali in 1824. By 1840, there were 30 such carriages in Cairo, but they could only be ridden outside the city, mainly in Shubra. It was becoming necessary to open large avenues which would allow for more than pedestrian traffic.

Two thoroughfares were considered in the framework of the *tanzim* (city plan), the first going from El-Muski to El-Azhar area, cutting through the old city from west to east; the other, a more ambitious project, was to link El-Ezbekiya to the Citadel. This was eventually to become Mohamed Ali Boulevard. Apart from a few expropriations in 1845, however, the project was not seriously launched until 30 years later.

"The plan was first laid out in 1873 according to Western rules," writes Jacques Berque in *Egypt: Imperialism and Revolution* (Faber and Faber, London, 1972): "Starting with a cadastral survey, the authorities then bought up or appropriated buildings; having thus acquired some 325 of these, they persuaded owners to hand over many more. There were long discussions as to whether the street should be lined with arcades or with a row of *labakh* — a sort of acacia recently imported from the Sudan, and popular in all the gardens of Cairo. The final decision was in favour of "weeping" arcades, or *bawaki*, since these enabled dwellings to project over the street and, in view of the few metres thus gained, the price of land could be raised.

"The area to be dealt with was razed by the canon of the Citadel, a method which would not have displeased the Baron Haussmann. To start with, the street required the destruction of a whole hill of tombs. Bonaparte had attempted this once; but the ensuing riot had made him draw back. This time the regime was more powerful or more wholehearted.

"The hill had to go. Its area was divided among the dignitaries of the realm, or distributed by lot. A double row of palaces was built; it is true that their facades concealed squalid lanes, or cut across a honeycomb of dwellings. They merely formed a screen on either side of the street. Cairo is like a cracked vase the two sides of which can never be mended. In any case, the administrators of the regime were proud of their work and never thought of weighing damage against progress."

Today, the street itself displays a number of interesting turn-of-the-century landmarks, though the original arcades have largely been pulled down, but it is in its back alleys, often hidden behind newly erected buildings, that one can still find some of the finest examples of Mameluke architecture.

The Ataba Market

The end of the last century was marked by a new concern for hygiene in handling foodstuffs. That, and a political need to control and properly tax the production, transport and distribution of food, which — having remained so far in the hands of peasants coming to the city to sell their ware themselves in scattered private markets — had evaded government officials' surveillance, emphasised the need for a more centralised form of distribution management.

In a study published by the Centre d'Etudes Economiques et Juridiques (CEDEJ) in its monthly publication *L'Observatoire Urbain du Caire Contemporain* (1995), Pascal Garret of the Ecole d'Architecture de Paris-La Villette retraces the history of the Ataba Market, the first of its kind in Egypt, which links Ataba Square to Mohamed Ali Street.

"On the boundaries of the old city and the new quarters, towards the end of the last century, a number of pavilions were built, for the purpose of housing the activities involved in the sale of foodstuff to the public," writes Garret. Because of the high cost of construction, several years elapsed between the beginning and the end of construction, which was completed eventually by Pierre Grand Bey, the then director of public works.

Of purely conventional European style, the market comprised two open alleys flanked by four main pavilions, each specialising in the sale of meat, fish, fruit and vegetables and groceries respectively. Two smaller pavilions, facing Mohamed Ali Street, included a bakery. There were no common services such as cold and storage rooms, and traders were individually responsible for the conservation of their products. Contraventions to the rules of hygiene caused the trader's permit (*rokhsa*) to be suspended.

At night, the huge iron gates of the market were padlocked, and writes Garett, it is probable that the police were in charge of its surveillance. No documentation exists as to whether the Ministry of Public Works extended cleaning services to the Ataba Market, or if, as is the practice nowadays, cleaning the pavilions was the responsibility of the owners.



Ataba Market may soon be only a memory



Scorpions in the sanctuary: the mosque of Qusun



Hala Cravata receiving the *noqta*, the dancer's fee, from her husband and impresario Ahmed

Dar El-Kutub El-Masriya

Located on Mohamed Ali Street, on the north side of Bab El-Khalq Square, with its main façade on Port Said Street, the Museum of Islamic Art was built in 1903 by Alfonso Manescalo in traditional Mameluke style.

Originally erected to house the first collection of Islamic antiquities as well as the Khedival Library, it was inaugurated on 28 December of the same year. At present, most of the books have been moved to Dar El-Kutub on the Corniche.

Qusun Mosque

This mosque was originally built by the Emir Seif El-Din Qusun, a favourite of El-Nasser Mohamed Ibn Qalaoun, who designated him the guardian of his children.

In 1873, part of it, including the minaret, was sacrificed to Mohamed Ali Street. Ali Mubarak restored it with an endowment from the Ministry of *Awqaf*, creating a school in its courtyard. The restoration was completed under the reign of Khedive Abbas Helmi II. Today the school no longer exists, but a garden has been planted, providing an unusual spot of greenery.

In the back of the mosque, a swamp area created by seepage is thick with wild plants, and the caretaker of the mosque claims that it is infested with snakes and scorpions. "We have complained endlessly," he says, "we would like this area to be cleared and we could plant a few trees."

At the back, a crumbling wall, all that is left of the original construction still stands. Birds are singing, frogs are croaking, bees are buzzing and suddenly, Mohamed Ali Street is no longer a busy street. In the little lane at the back of the mosque one can enjoy a taste of the countryside.

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

Japan's exacting travellers

Energetic, cultured and anxious to purchase local products. Where else could these tourists be from but Japan? Since the 1980s, Japanese tourists have begun to appear in large numbers in Egypt. **Rehab Saad** looks into the new market



Discerning travellers from the Far East

A "Japanese market" was unknown to Egyptian travel agencies until relatively recently. Now, it is fast becoming one of considerable potential, vying with tourists from Europe and the US. Japanese tourism has become the focus of serious promotional campaigns in Egypt.

Japan's exposure to other cultures has been slow. Since 1972, however, Egyptian travel agencies became aware of the large number of Japanese tourists going to Europe and began to think of ways of attracting them to Egypt. Their efforts have been rewarded.

"In 1984, we organised an Egyptian exhibition in Japan called 'The Golden Pharaoh' which toured seven Japanese cities," explained Bahig El-Gohary, president of a travel agency that brings the bulk of Japanese tourists to Egypt. "After that, Japanese tourists started to come to Egypt in increasing numbers."

El-Gohary's travel agency's efforts extend beyond the customary. "In 1986, a 'Japanese Week' was organised in Egypt in collaboration with the Japanese Embassy," El-Gohary explained, "and for the first time Japanese travellers became keen to include Egypt in their itineraries. An exhibition of Egyptian antiquities abroad also did much to entice people to come and see the country for themselves. That was in 1990 and the effect on revenues is apparent."

Market studies on the flow of Japanese tourists to Egypt by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism reveal that Japanese tourists tend to stay a shorter time in Egypt than most, but they spend more. "The ministry consequently organised a promotional campaign governed by their specific needs and this has resulted in a 36 per cent increase in the market," El-Gohary said.

Massamichi Nakano, manager of one of the travel agencies catering to Japanese tourists, explained that Egypt is well known in Japan. "Its history, especially ancient history, is taught in schools and courses in ancient history are given at university. Also, the general public is acquainted with Egypt through TV programmes and newspapers. Documentary films on Egyptian sites and tourist destinations are screened on TV three times a week," he said.

Nakano pointed out that some Japanese firms organise incentive trips for their workers. "One of the medical companies, Takeda, organised a trip for 120 of its employees last April. They visited Cairo, Luxor and Abu Simbel," he said. He added that some members of the group were particularly interested in communicating with Egyptians, so "we organised gatherings with Egyptian families where they could sit together, chat through an interpreter and eat oriental food."

It is interesting to observe that Japanese tourists are described as the most disciplined and punctual of all tourists. "Because the Japanese have limited holidays, they plan trips three or four years in advance. They fly for 23 hours to get here and expect to find everything in order when they arrive. They will not tolerate any excuses for altered programmes or a change in the timing of a domestic flight. We have to reimburse about three per cent of the expenses of the trip even if the domestic flight is delayed for half an hour," El-Gohary said.

According to Nakano, 80 per cent of Japanese tourists like to visit Cairo, Luxor and Aswan. "About 10 per cent prefer to combine their trips to Cairo with Greece and Turkey. Five per cent come to Cairo, visit Sinai and then travel on to Israel. And five per cent like to go to the Red Sea or Western Desert oases like Bahariya and Siwa," he said.

"If we want to get a better share of the Japanese market — and of the 16 million tourists who come out of Japan annually — then we have to increase the number of flights between the two countries," explained Abu-Bakr El-Shorbagy, president of 3A Tours which brings about 2,000 Japanese travellers to Egypt annually. He added that there are now only three flights a week by EgyptAir from Cairo to Osaka and Tokyo. "The Turkish airlines organise many trips to Japan and give very attractive incentive rates to them which, of course, attracts them," he said.

A plan is under way to attract about 2,000 Japanese to Mount Sinai on 31 December 1999 to witness the dawn of the year 2000. According to El-Shorbagy, 3A Tours has many innovative promotional ideas like organising cycle rides around Egypt and "visiting places like Cairo, Ismailia, Port Said, Suez, Dahshur and Alexandria." He organised a Japanese fashion show at the foot of the Pyramids in 1995, where he brought Japanese models to show their traditional kimonos.

• IN HIS speech to the World Tourism Organisation symposium titled "Marketing Opportunities in the Middle East and North Africa", which was held last year, Tetsuya Sato, head of foreign promotion at the Japanese Tourist Organisation, said that Egypt was a favourite tourist destination for the Japanese in the Middle East. But, according to the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation, language barriers, security concerns, anxiety about health and high travel costs hinder overseas travel for the Japanese.

• To encourage more Japanese to visit the Middle East, it is felt that there should be a clear statement by the countries of the region of their keenness to host more Japanese and East Asians, "apart from official messages in sponsored newspapers, magazines and supplements," Sato said. *He suggested that a special invitation could be issued to the Japanese to* visit the countries of the region at a special rate. "Say $500 for 1,000 young Japanese tourists over a period of perhaps five years," he suggested, "jointly sponsored by the official tourist offices, air carriers, hotels and other industry-related people."

• According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism, the number of Japanese who visited Egypt in the period from January to March 1997 was 38,089 compared to 32,308 in the same period last year. About 89,807 Japanese visited Egypt in 1996 compared to 69,253 in 1995.

Early Christian relics uncovered

Middle Egypt was once home to hundreds of early Christian churches and hermitages. **Samir Naoum** describes some of the latest discoveries at the edge of the Western Desert in Minya Governorate

A subterranean church has recently been discovered beneath the ruins of an ancient church at Kom El-Namrud near Bahnasa, south of Minya. Less than 100 metres north, the ruins of an early Christian community have also been found. Taken together, these discoveries are casting more light on the spread of Christianity in Middle Egypt.

Kom El-Namrud is one of a group of independent *koms* (mounds) which the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) began excavating in 1984 following the discovery of a church the year before. The upper church was probably built soon after the Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th century, so it was with delight that the team found an earlier church — believed to be one of the earliest ever built in Egypt — on a lower level.

Although largely in ruins, it is evident that the new discovery was the basilican shape of all early Coptic churches with three divisions: the narthex, the main body of the church, and the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the main body had been destroyed, even the position of the columns was not clear, but the remains of a low wall appeared during excavation which could have been the place where deacons stood during the service. Along both sides of the nave, other walls with well-preserved white plaster were found.

The church may have been used by a nearby community of monks. The ruins of houses constructed around a depression to the north have been uncovered.

Although at first it was not clear whether this was urban housing or housing for a religious community, the latter is now thought to be the case, judging by the relatively few signs of wear and tear on the construction. The remote position of the houses, at the margin of the desert close to the church also suggests that the complex belonged to monks, although only a single leather cross in poor condition was found.

The earliest chambers in the housing complex, which lie to the north of a court, may originally have been an isolated house comprising three chambers, one leading into the other. Other rooms were added with much wider entrances later, until the structure became a housing complex with at least 12 chambers, the final one being the main entrance.

A number of niches were found in some of the ruined walls along with some pottery shards, which have been dated to the first half of the 7th century, pottery toys, and, in the south-east corner of one of the chambers, an oven.

The monks are thought to have lived originally in isolated caves, coming together only for religious services once a week. Later, with the development of the monastic movement in the 6th century, the monks were drawn together in more settled communities closer to the church.

Kom El-Namrud was named after a ruler who governed early in the Christian era and the name is, in fact, Nubian, not Egyptian. All of Middle Egypt was home to hundreds of monastic settlements, especially between the 6th and 18th centuries. Literary sources indicate that as many as 22,000 monks resided there at the peak of the monastic movement in the 6th and early 7th centuries, not counting communities of nuns.

Excavations in the area continue, and the SCA is confident of making more discoveries.

Piece of the month

A woman's work is never done

The statue of a female labourer and an ostracon *(inscribed stone fragment) of a pregnant woman* are on special display in the foyer of the Egyptian Museum this month. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

The Egyptian Museum continues its display of objects related to maternity and motherhood. The series started two months ago with the display of Taweret, the goddess of fertility and protection.

This time, two small objects dating from the New Kingdom have pride of place. One is a statuette of a woman giving birth aided, on each side, by Hathor the goddess of love, beauty, motherhood and protection. "The squatting position was regarded as the best for giving birth and the Ancient Egyptians used a special stool designed for this purpose," explains Mohamed Gomaa, assistant director of the museum. He adds that this statuette is proof that the Ancient Egyptians first designed the delivery chair, not the Americans as it is claimed. The limestone statuette was discovered in Dendera and was previously on display in Room 24 on the first floor.

The other object on show is a limestone ostracon engraved with the outline of a woman encircling with her arms a cross-section of the child in her belly. This drawing may actually be Isis holding her child Horus in the sun-disk at the level of her pelvis or else, as suggested by Mohamed Saleh, general director of the museum, "It might show the position c. he baby inside the belly of his mother as sonar and X-rays do today."

The piece was previously on display in Room 24 on the second floor. Some restoration was necessary before the piece was exhibited.

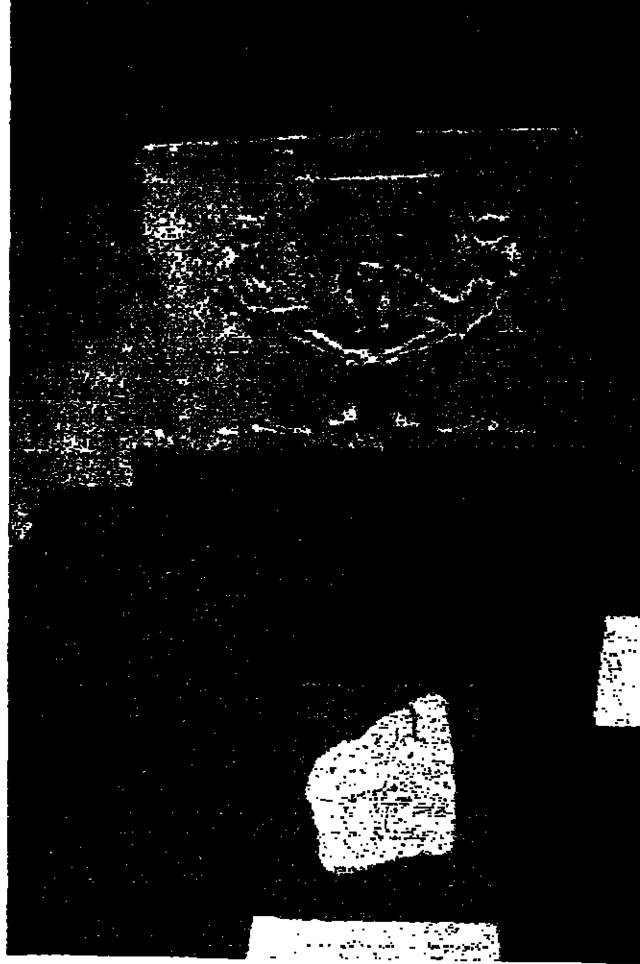


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45, second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vuc.edu/~hoggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/The Tropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aaa5u/city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aaa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are offering special prices for summer. Prices are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

Sobel Travel is offering trips to Europe and the USA as of July. Trips to Paris go for LE2,700 including accommodation in three-star hotels, breakfast included, as well as internal transportation and sightseeing tours.

Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE4,750 including accommodation in three-star hotels. A 14-day trip to the USA costs LE7,900 including visits to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Orlando and Miami. The price includes accommodation and internal transportation.

Falcon Travel offers special prices until 30 June including flight tickets, accommodation and sightseeing tours. Trips are scheduled for Tunisia, Antalya and Istanbul. Prices are LE1,700, LE999 and LE1,299 respectively.

Hotels

Cairo
Semiramis Inter-Continental is offering a double room for LE120, including a breakfast buffet, free access to the health club, the jacuzzi, sauna and swimming pool. If the client stays for three nights, he will get the fourth free. The offer is valid until 20 July and subject to availability.

Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.

Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

Fayed
Helnan Morgan Fayed is offering special prices from 20 May to 31 July. The offer includes LE85 per person in a double room including breakfast, services and taxes.

South Sinai
Helnan Dahab is offering a double room for LE99 per person including the breakfast buffet, services and taxes. If the client books a room he can get another one free, breakfast included. The offer lasts until 30 June.

Sharm El-Sheikh Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160 and doubles for LE190. The offer is valid through June and July and subject to availability.

Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.

Red Sea
Helnan Regina Hotel Hurghada is offering rooms for LE120 per person on a half-board basis. The offer is valid until the end of June.

Hurghada Inter-Continental Resort and Casino is offering single rooms for LE160, doubles for LE190 and villas for LE1,100 including the breakfast buffet, complimentary gifts and discounts. The offer is valid throughout June and July and subject to availability.

Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



Unexpected gold in Bari

Gold on the vaulting horse, and controversy in the boxing ring. **Abeer Anwar** reports on the latest happenings in Bari

Egypt's fortunes at the Mediterranean Games took a surprise turn for the better when unknown young gymnast Raouf Abdel-Karim sneaked past the favourites to win Egypt's third gold medal.

Abdel-Karim won first place in the vault, scoring 9.225 to beat his world-champion standard French and Italian rivals, who came second and third with 8.875 and 8.850 respectively.

Unlike swimmer Rania Elwani, Abdel-Karim has not had a great deal of experience training abroad. Most of his preparations were with the national team in Egypt, although he took part in the African Championships and then attended an eight-day camp in Russia just before the Games. It was not even intended that Abdel-Karim should represent Egypt at Bari. His chance came as a result of an injury sustained by top gymnast Walid Said. "Luck helped me," Abdel-Karim commented. "I wasn't supposed to take part in this event."

He added: "This is only the start. I promise to do my best to put Egypt back on the international gymnastics scene after a long absence."

Wagdi Abdel-Moeti, head of the Egyptian Gymnastics Federation, was delighted with Abdel-Karim's performance. "I cannot believe that after all this time, Egyptian gymnastics could reappear on the international level, especially considering that we were depending on our juniors. But Raouf has proved that the juniors can do a lot," he said.

Delegation head Mohamed Demerdash El-Touni joined the congratulations, promising that Abdel-Karim would carry the Egyptian flag at the closing ceremony. He also presented him with a $600 bonus.

Meanwhile, Amr Mustafa took the bronze in the under 91kg boxing tournament — the only one of six national team boxers to win a medal. The boxing at Bari has been surrounded by controversy. Mustafa insisted that he should have done even better, and blamed biased refereeing for his third place. "I should have won the gold medal, but the referee was biased towards my opponent, who is his fellow countryman," he said.

Meanwhile, Algeria filed a formal protest after Ben Guesima failed to be awarded the gold after the heavyweight final. The top spot instead went to Giacobbe Fragomeni of Italy, based on a computer score. However, four judges — from Egypt, Sweden, Tunisia and Greece — had the Algerian far ahead on points. Only the Croatian judge had him drawing with the Italian. "It's a pity — and it's not very honest — to deprive Ben Guesima of what is rightfully his," complained Amar Brahima, head of the Algerian federation. "We think the result was manipulated and we can prove it," he added.

After a re-examination of the result, Ben Guesima was summoned back from Algeria for a special ceremony where we was belatedly awarded the gold medal.

Controversies aside, for Egypt, the success of Abdel-Karim and Mustafa has made up for the disappointingly weak performance of the handball team. Far from coming home with the gold or silver, the team has retreated to somewhere around fifth or sixth place. Not only that, but they are losing their matches with a large goal difference. They conceded victory to Spain by 13 goals (16-29), and have only managed one win — against Algeria — after a lengthy rest period.



Raouf Abdel-Karim on display at the Mediterranean Games where he collected the gold in the horse-vault event photo: Mohamed El-Qiti

Egyptian referees pushing for space

More Egyptian squash referees are pushing to qualify to judge international matches. The Al-Ahram Championship is helping them achieve this aim. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** investigates

It is ironic that while Egypt has managed to set up and organise what has become one of the world's major squash tournaments, it still does not have a sufficient number of qualified referees to preside over all its matches.

This year, the organisers of the Al-Ahram International Squash Championship asked the World Squash Federation (WSF) to authorise eight Egyptian referees to cover all the tournament's matches. The request was turned down. To acquire the necessary WSF International Certificate for Refereeing, according to federation rules, a referee must judge 15 international matches under supervision over a period of three years.

Egyptian squash expert Abbas Kaoud, who has been very supportive of local referees, came to an agreement with the WSF by which international referees Graham Horrex and Jack Flynn would assess local referees during the Al-Ahram Championships.

"WSF officials were dubious about our efficiency in judging crucial matches, but in the Al-Ahram Championship, one of the world's largest, the Egyptians were able to prove their capability," said Kaoud.

Irish international referee Jack Flynn explained how the process of assessment and qualification works. He or Horrex observe the refereeing during the matches, and if they have any comments they discuss them with the referee after the match. After the tournament, they will send their assessment to the WSF. The Egyptian Squash Federation will then nominate referees to be graded and certified, and the WSF agrees to these nominations according to the assessments. Providing they have completed 15 matches, candidates judged satisfactory will then be qualified as international referees.

There are currently four Egyptians who could qualify after the Al-Ahram tournament — Nasser Zahran, Khaled El-Shazly, Tarek Shamekh, and Hosni Abdel-Moneim. Of these, Zahran is the closest to achieving international status. After Ahmed Barada's match against Rodney Eyles, which turned out to be one of the toughest a referee would ever have to judge, Jack Flynn — assessing Zahran in that match — commented: "Zahran is one of the best referees I have ever seen. He controlled the match very well... He is a former top player, and he did not make any mistake during the Barada-Eyles match."

It would help budding Egyptian international referees if they could judge championships abroad to speed up the completion of their 15 required matches. But most of them cannot afford to travel abroad as trainee referees and have to rely on the three international championships held in Egypt — the Gezira Open, Heliopolis Open, and Al-Ahram — to achieve their qualification.

One happy consequence of the qualification of more Egyptians as international refugees would be that the organisers of Egypt's three international tournaments would save a lot of money.

"It is very costly having to buy tickets for foreign referees, arrange for their accommodation, and pay their judging fees. We could certainly cut down on expenses if we could use all local referees, who, after all have proved they are up to the required standard," said Kaoud. "Our referees have judged more than 60 matches in this tournament and neither of the assessing referees have reported any mistake so far," he added.

But the advantages of an all-Egyptian judging line-up are not merely financial. With its spectacular setting at the foot of the Pyramids, the Al-Ahram Championship is a very Egyptian event. "Since the organisers, sponsors, and workers are Egyptian, and even the venue is so representative of Egypt, then why not have Egyptian referees too and dispense with anything that is foreign," said Kaoud.

Jansher still the best?

Peter Nicol was as surprised as anyone else by his win over seven-time World Champion Jansher Khan. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

Jansher Khan had his eye on Egypt's Ahmed Barada, carefully honing his game for when he went up against the young up-and-comer. But Khan, who is ranked number one in the world of professional squash, made a fatal mistake — paying little attention to the toils of Peter Nicol, the 24-year-old powerhouse from Scotland. Nicol, who before the second Al-Ahram International Squash Championship was ranked number four, had beaten Khan in two out of 12 matches in the past, and was hell bent on repeating this in a major tournament.

At the Al-Ahram Championship, he had the opportunity. The final match between the two men was both intense and skillfully played.

Prior to the match, Khan had explained that "Winning the first game is very important." And he did, pulling ahead of Nicol to win the game, 15-12. From there on, it was a tug-of-war between the two men, neither one giving up any points easily. By the end of the match, Nicol had clinched the championship with a decisive score of 3-1.

Nicol was, at first, incredulous, not believing that he had won until the referee had announced the results twice. "It feels wonderful to beat the number one player," said the elated Nicol after the match. "But Jansher is still the best, and I can't compare myself to him yet."

What modesty was evident in this statement, however, did little to detract from his feeling of accomplishment. "I worked hard for this," he stated. "I was getting tired by the fourth game, but I made Jansher exert a lot of effort... I didn't miss any shot, and I won." Indeed, to the surprise of many.

But checking the record on Nicol's career, it is clear that the victory was both hard earned and deserved. Since turning pro five years ago, the young Scot has moved up some 160 places, until he was ranked fourth in the world from 1994 until now. With this win, Nicol moves up to the number two slot, and Barada has taken his place as the world's number four. Over this half decade career, Nicol has gathered several titles in major competitions such as the Canadian Open in 1995 and the Hartford Cup in 1997. In others, such as the Rush Creek US Open in 1996, the Hungarian Open in 1997 and the Leekes British Open in 1997, where he lost to Khan, 0-3, Nicol has finished second.

The Al-Ahram title has not lulled the new world number two into a sense of false security. Nicol, as with any top professional athlete, has his eye on the future. Beating Khan once, he said, does not make me the best. "In order to hold on to what I achieved tonight. I intend to keep working hard in tournaments, and improving my game," stated Nicol.

On the subject of Egypt's Barada, he is equally determined and pragmatic. "Barada is a tremendous squash player," he noted. "He plays a spectacular game of squash, and he is still only 20 years old. He is going to be my main source of competition in the future."

In the finals of the women's competition, the world number one Sarah Fitzgerald vied with world number two Michelle Martin in what also proved to be a powerful game. Although Martin had defeated Fitzgerald 3-1 in the British Open this year, the latter came back with a vengeance in this championship, and claimed the title with a decisive 3-0 win.

On the sidelines

Players' words:

Simon Parke
(seeded 7)
"Playing at the foot of the Pyramids is a breath-taking experience... so much history. If you start thinking about it you may forget how to play squash. When I'm not playing squash and watching the other players, it's a good feeling to look at the court before the Pyramids."

Chris Walker
(seeded 6)
"I really enjoyed it the first time and I've come back here and everything has been twice as good as last year which I didn't think was possible. Every time I come up the path to the court, I think it's fantastic and we've been looked after very well."

Alex Gough
(seeded 28)
"It's just tremendous, I think it's the most spectacular venue for any sport in the world. I want to continue winning just to play more on the glass court."

Carol Ownes
(seeded 5)
"Playing out here at the Pyramids is really great, and media coverage was also very good, with most of the matches broadcast live."

Sarah Fitzgerald
(seeded 1)
"Ever since I was a kid, I've always wanted to visit the Pyramids, and here I am playing in front of them."

Withdrawals aplenty

THE tournament witnessed quite a number of withdrawals, the first of which was in the qualifying rounds of the women's event, when Sarah Cook, ranked 29, retired from her match against Egypt's Salma Shabana at 9/6 2/6 to Salma, due to a twisted ankle.

Even before the tournament started, Mark Chaloner withdrew at the last minute due to a sudden injury. Paul Johnson, ranked 26, replaced Chaloner. In the first round of the men's event, Zarak Jahan Khan, ranked 22, wasn't feeling very well but refused to withdraw and lost to Simon Parke 13/15 3/15 4/15.

In the second round, Jonathan Power, ranked 4, withdrew from his match against Alex Gough, ranked 28, after a back injury sustained on court. The score was 10/15, 15/5, 10/2 to Gough.

Morocco win

MOROCCO moved closer to the 1998 African Nations Cup finals with a 1-0 victory over Egypt in a qualifying tie last weekend, AFP reports.

Substitute striker Salaheddine Bassir scored the winning goal after 71 minutes, to the relief of the 80,000 spectators crammed into the National Stadium in Rabat, Morocco.

Victory took Morocco to the top of Group III, giving them a three-point lead over Senegal. They complete their mini-league programme in July with games against Ethiopia and Senegal.

The clash between old regional rivals was fiercely fought with the Pharaohs massing in defence. The Malian referee cautioned five players as tempers flared.

Egypt are without a win after four rounds. Their only chance of reaching the finals is by gaining maximum points from home matches against Senegal and Ethiopia.

The host country, Burkina Faso, and cup-holders South Africa qualify automatically for the 16-nation tournament to be staged in Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso from 7-28 February 1998.

El-Shafie's high tennis hopes

Ismail El-Shafie has become the first Egyptian to be elected to the board of the International Tennis Federation. He spoke to **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** about his plans for tennis in the Arab world and Africa

Egypt now has a representative on the international tennis scene, following the election of Ismail El-Shafie as a board member of the International Tennis Federation (ITF). El-Shafie was elected during the federation's recent annual general assembly, which took place in Cairo this year.

Cairo had been due to host the assembly in 1995, but the venue was changed following a spate of terrorist attacks. This year the Egyptian Tennis Federation (ETF) applied again to host the meeting and the application was accepted.

Topics for discussion included the latest news of the game, new regulations, future plans, evaluation of tournaments, the initiation of new tournaments for the disabled and the election of a new ITF board — which takes place every two years. The Egyptian federation nominated Ismail El-Shafie, an experienced player and ex-ETF president, and he was accepted for one of 12 places out of a total of 22 candidates.

He is the first Egyptian to join the federation board, and the second Arab after Fathi Fareh from Tunisia, who was re-elected this year. The election of the two men — both Africans as well as Arabs — has led to hopes for a higher profile for African and Arab tennis.

"My dream is to do my best for Africa, the Arabs and Egypt," El-Shafie said after his election. So what are his plans? It's early days and he is still busy considering which of his dreams he can reasonably expect to become a reality. However, one ambition is for the ITF to set up an international training centre in northern Africa similar to the centre in South Africa which serves the southern half of the continent. He is supported in his enthusiasm for this project by Fareh.

Much of El-Shafie's work will be done in two of the federation's international sub-committees — he is head of the sub-committees concerned with coaches and satellite competitions.

"I hope to increase the number of satellite competitions in Africa," he said. "There are 110 satellite tournaments throughout the world, but only six of these are in Africa — three in Egypt, and one each in Morocco, Tunisia and South Africa. On the other hand, there are nine satellites in Spain alone." He explained the importance of satellites — international multi-venue competitions with average prize money — in terms of the benefit to up-and-coming young players. They provide an opportunity for juniors to gain international experience and to gain points in the international rankings, he said.

In addition, El-Shafie has secured the appointment of Hisham Nasser, an ex-player, coach and tournament director, to the juniors' sub-committee. Hisham shares El-Shafie's concern with the junior game and aims to increase the number of tournaments for juniors organised by the ITF and the ETF.

Improving the quality of coaching is another subject dear to El-Shafie's heart. He is planning for Egypt to host its own international coaching course to enable Egyptian coaches to qualify at home, rather than having to travel abroad.

Clearly El-Shafie will be an active voice for Africa, the Arab countries and the game as a whole. As members of the ITF board, he said: "We represent all, we represent the continent, we represent the tennis players, so we'll do our best."

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

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photo: Randa Shaath

Gamil George: Heartstrings for sale

Mohamed Ali Street was known for its [illegible] shops where copper instruments for the many brass bands that flourished at the beginning of the century could be found. Of greater fame however, were the shops which traded in traditional Arabic music instruments. Today many still exist, but, next to a few lutes and the odd *tabla*, they display more modern electrical instruments. Not Gamil George's, however. He has refused to let his shop, established by his father in 1912, obey the dictates of fashion

Gamil George is not a talkative man. He is tired and nostalgic. Whatever promises life once held have not been fulfilled. The past was so much brighter than the present, he seems to say. He sits in his shop, on a wooden café chair, elbows on his knees. The shop looks exactly as it must have at the beginning of the century, but Gamil George, stubbornly repeating the gestures which he learned in his youth from his father, is aware that he is practising a dying craft. Like the street, the shop bespeaks happier, busier times, when the *oud* was a revered instrument and famous musicians came in droves to buy the best *ouds* from the most prestigious music shop on the street, that of Gamil George.

Gamil slowly gets up, picks up an instrument which has been lying in a corner and begins to work on it. He is perfectly at home in the ill-lit, irregularly shaped, little basement store, leaning over the *oud* he is in the process of tuning. The world around him has ceased to exist. Music and the *oud* are, have always been, his whole life. *Ouds* line the specially made wooden shelves, bearing the famous signature in mother-of-pearl on their faces. In the back, two young artisans, standing beside an enormous work bench, are gluing several strips of fine wood together. A long table at the front of the shop displays an assortment of tools, a number of rags and a mess of strings. A few clients venture in and out of the shop, a music professor and his student select an instrument for beginners, examine it for a long time, then leave, promising to return. Gamil does not stir, letting employees deal with the visitors.

He never married. Why? "Circumstances", he says, waving his hand vaguely, dismissing the subject. "It just did not happen."

His father migrated to Cairo from Aleppo in 1912, like many Ottoman subjects who found better opportunities and peace in Egypt. Most of those who settled in Cairo specialised in the commerce of textiles and congregated in El-Hamzawi, the part of the Muski which became synonymous with the trade. Gamil George senior was a musician and an outstanding artisan. He learned the art working with one of his uncles, who made and sold musical instruments in his native city. He continued his trade in Egypt, opening a shop on Mohamed Ali Street, the street of the entertainers.

Gamil George senior made lutes and *qanuns* (defined by E W Lane as "a sort of dulcimer"), and soon became known as the best in the business. The *oud* and the *qanun* were among the most popular instruments at concerts of Egyptian music. The *oud* in particular was, for many centuries, the instrument most commonly used by the best musicians and celebrated by many poets. "Not any more," says Gamil, "not since they started using the electrical stuff. It doesn't sound the same, but nobody seems to care." The *qanun* has almost disappeared, and even he does not find its manufacture commercially viable; soon the *oud* will be an instrument of the past, something recorded in history books.

He still plays the *oud*, however — the real thing — for his friends at private parties; he sings, but only "the classics", the songs of Umm Kulthoum, Abdel-Wahab and Farid El-Atrash. "None of the new songs, which have nothing to do with Arabic music."

Young Gamil was often in Mohamed Ali Street, hanging around his father's shop, and he used to see the singers who came to have their instruments tuned, strings replaced, or to buy a new instrument. He also saw the singers and dancers who lived on the street. "Nabawiya Mustafa lived in the building where we had our first shop" — a fire destroyed this first shop a few years back and Gamil moved next door — "and Sayed Darwish was a regular client," he says. He also remembers seeing Munira El-Mahdiya and Umm Kulthoum coming around in a *hantour* (horse-drawn carriage). Umm Kulthoum wanted a smaller *oud* than the regular one, and all her musicians bought their instruments from his father.

Did his father want him to continue the trade? Gamil George shrugs. He learned to play the *oud* because he had wanted to, he had always loved the sound of the instrument and admired his father playing it, but he also had a "good education". He was not necessarily destined to run the shop. He is proud of his flawless French, pointing out that he learned the language in the best school in Egypt, that of the Frères of Khoronfish. He was also sent to a college in Lebanon, where he spent two years. "In 1936, I was 12. I caught typhoid fever and the doctor said that I needed mountain air to recover properly. I was sent to Lebanon with my brother." He missed the shop, however, and was glad to be back.

After he finished college, Gamil came to work with his father and his brother. His father died in 1961, leaving the shop to his sons. The older brother's health no longer allows him to come to the shop, so Gamil looks after it alone. He travels every day from Heliopolis, where he has always lived.

What does he do in his leisure time? He points at the *oud*; he loves music, he finally says.

Gamil George raises his head. A client, a rather old man, is sitting on a small stool in a corner, waiting while Gamil examines his *oud*. "The strings are worn," he tells him briefly. The client frowns then resumes an obviously old conversation. "As I was telling you last time, he was very tight with money," he says; "he kept it at home, he never trusted banks." Gamil smiles fleetingly and whispers a comment. It becomes clear that they have been talking about the renowned singer Mohamed Abdel-Wahab and it seems that time has stopped, that the gossip is about an acquaintance they have just seen recently.

"Abdel-Wahab used to come here a lot in the '20s," says Gamil. "He was a great artist, but not exactly a big spender." One of the employees has been examining the client's *oud*. "You are right," he tells Gamil, "it does need new strings."

The client is reluctant to change the strings and insists that they are still good. A new set is too expensive, he says. "Fine," says Gamil ironically, "just don't play too hard."

He has been working for some time on a small object, polishing it with a file, looking at it, rubbing it with an oily cloth, then resuming his filing. He is working on a plectrum (a small pick of bone, ivory, wood of horn used to pluck the strings of a musical instrument. In the case of the *oud*, horn is the most commonly used material), which he finally shows the client. "Here, this will help," he says. "Soak it overnight in olive oil, polish it some more, and it will be ready to use." The client looks at the plectrum suspiciously. "How much?" he asks. "Nothing," says Gamil. "It's a present." The old man grabs the object, examines it and then pockets it, mumbling thanks. He finally leaves. Gamil sighs. "This is the kind of client we get today," he says. "This one used to be Abdel-Wahab's private secretary. He learned the notes, but he is not good, and he is as stingy as his master."

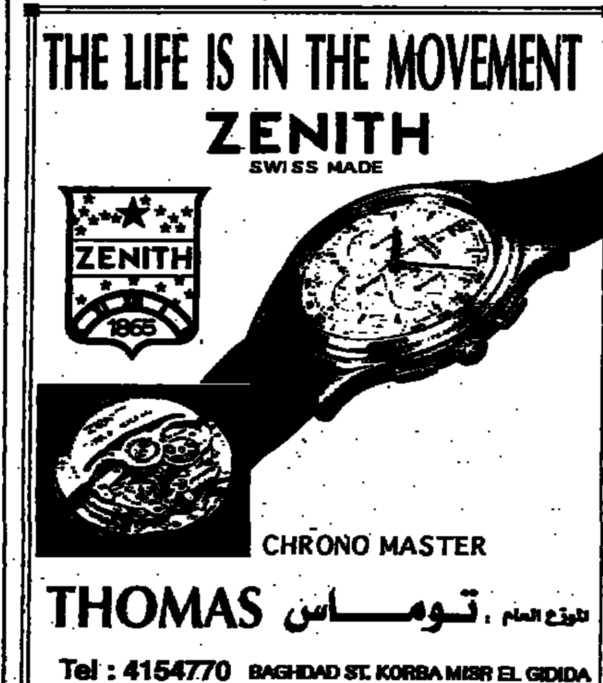
There are no more good *oud* players these days, because the lute has become an obsolete instrument, replaced by "all these modern electrical things," Gamil says. This is where the money is, he says rather scornfully, money for the performers and for the shops along the street. A good *oud* costs a lot of money, of course, depending on the wood, but there are few players who can tell the difference in the quality of wood. They go for the fancy, more ornate instruments, not knowing that the decoration does not make the player.

The *oud* described by E W Lane is much the same as those one can buy in Gamil George's shop: "The length of the *oud*, measuring from the button or angle of the neck, is twenty five inches and a half. The body of it is composed of fine deal, with edges of ebony; the neck of ebony, faced with box and an ebony edge. The instrument has seven double strings, two to each note. They are of lamb's guts. The plectrum is a slip of vulture's feather."

The only difference between Lane's *oud* and the ones sold in Gamil George's shop is that the strings are now of nylon and the plectrum of horn, which the experts agree does not affect the sound in the least.

The sun is setting. Gamil pulls his stool closer to the shop entrance. He caresses the *oud* in his lap with the tip of his fingers, pinches the cords, and a few nostalgic notes resound over the din of the traffic. Gamil, oblivious of the noises of a street entering evening, is alone with his memories and their music.

Profile by ***Fayza Hassan***



Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Men in uniform, they really distress my pacemaker. Well this week I rubbed shoulders with the top brass of the country while attending the graduation of the first journalists to receive the Nasser Military Academy Fellowship. **Yasser Rizq** from *Al-Akhbar* newspaper and **Osama Heikal** from *Al-Wafd*, both military correspondents, were among more than 100 researchers from Arab and African countries graduating from the academy's national strategy classes. The ceremony was attended by Minister of Defence **Mohamed Hussein Tantawi**, Foreign Minister **Amr Moussa**, Minister of Education **Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin**, Minister for Scientific Research **Venice Kamel Gouda**, Chief of Staff **Magdi Hattata** and a number of Arab and African ambassadors to Egypt.

Fellowship recipients crisply walked across the stage, which was decorated with the various flags, dressed in national military garb and boasting a green or red ribbon across their chest according to their field of study. After the ceremony I watched the ecstatic faces of the new fellows as I munched on a grand breakfast of smoked salmon sandwiches, French pastries and orange juice.

Although Yasser and Osama are the first journalists to become Fellows of the Nasser Military Academy, the good news is that *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s very own military writer **Galal Nassar** was nominated by **Ibrahim Nafie** chairman and chief editor of Al-Ahram and **Hosni Guindi** our editor-in-chief to take some time off to study for the fellowship starting next month.

So dearies this time next year, I look forward to another grand breakfast and seeing **Galal** line-up to become a fellow.


Yasser Rizq **Osama Heikal**

